Windows 7
Back up your data for free with File History

Windows 8.1
Enjoy free music with the built-in Music app!

Windows 10
Find out what the new Windows is really like!

Windows Help & Advice

Future

CHRISTMAS 2014

REFRESH WINDOWS

Make your PC as good as new!

- Clean up your hard drive
- Give Windows a speed boost
- Reinstall Windows with ease

BEGINNERS' GUIDE

Access files anywhere using your OneDrive

The complete guide to using Microsoft's amazing cloud service

HANDS ON WITH WINDOWS 10
We find the hidden features in the new OS!

86 PAGES OF EXPERT ADVICE

- Run Windows on an iPad
- The latest Bluetooth speakers tested
- Research your family tree

PLUS! THE LATEST PC GAMES & KIT REVIEWED AND RATED!

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† Monitoring Report of the European Recovered Paper Council, (ERPC), 2010

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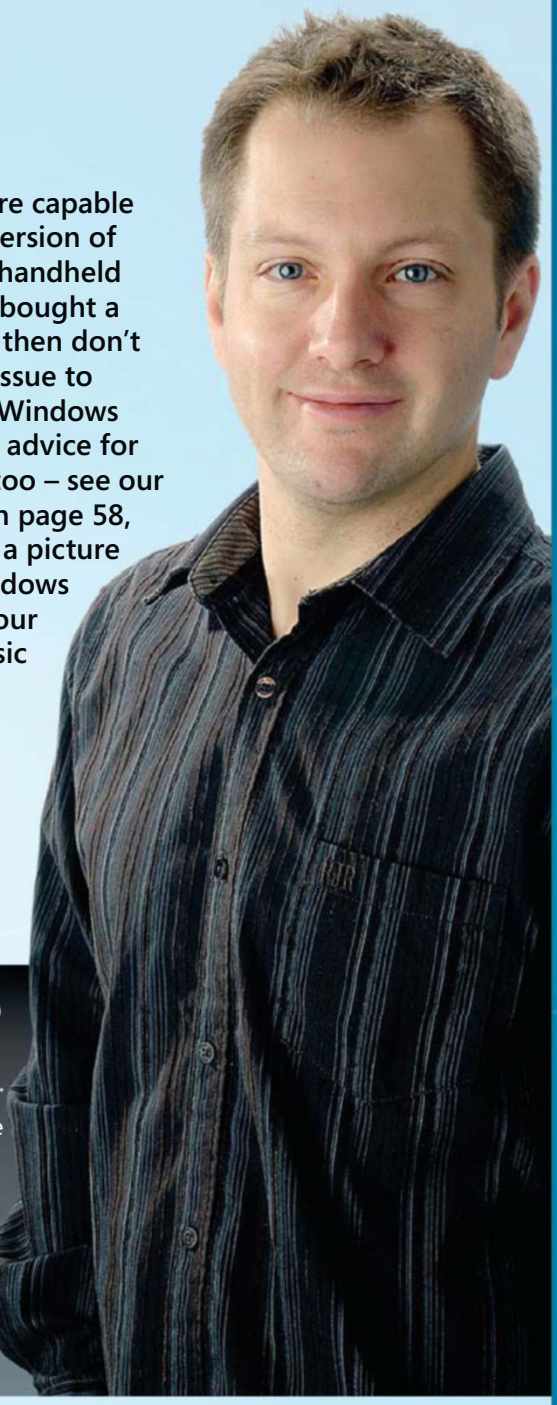
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Print and Paper.
The environmental facts may surprise you

TWO SIDES

Windows Help & Advice

Welcome



It's been another frantic month in the *Windows Help & Advice* office, with the brand new preview version of Windows 10 to play with (read all about our adventures with Windows 10 on page 66), a small clutch of Bluetooth speakers to try out (see page 80) and a selection of cracking games that start on page 88. The versatility of modern PCs never ceases to amaze me. Many tablets restrict what you can do with them, but Microsoft doesn't like to set limits on what its devices are capable of, so you get a full version of Windows, even on a handheld device. If you've just bought a new Windows tablet then don't miss our guide next issue to getting started with Windows 8.1. There's plenty of advice for beginners this issue too – see our guide to OneDrive on page 58, our tutorial on using a picture as a password in Windows 8.1 on page 28, and our tour of the Xbox Music app on page 54.

Graham Barlow Editor-in-Chief
www.facebook.com/windowsmag



SUBSCRIBE TO THE MAG TODAY AND SAVE - JUST TURN TO PAGE 30!

We pride ourselves in being the only magazine on the shelves to show you exactly how to get the best from the Windows operating system, whether it's 7, 8, 10, Vista or even XP. *Windows Help & Advice* also comes with a disc, on which you can find some of the great apps covered in the magazine. If you get a chance, take a look at how you can even read the magazine on your laptop, phone or tablet.

This month...



Catherine Ellis
Operations Editor
Sadly, it's her last issue. Good luck in your new job Cat!



Dave James
Commissioning Ed
Dave has been loving playing *Dead Rising 3* - see page 92.



Nick Odantzis
Deputy Editor
Frustrated muso Nick has been trying out Blutooth speakers on page 80.

Windows Help & Advice

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Essential hints and tips to get your Windows 7 PC running good as new

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Discover how to get the most out of Microsoft's brilliant cloud storage service

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Our experts take the Technical Preview edition for a spin and share their thoughts

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EXPLORE
The best PC tutorials



Your guide Graham Barlow says...
"Each month we include as wide a range of tutorials as possible, to help you use your computer more efficiently and inspire you to try new things."

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28 Set a picture password in Windows 8

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38 Connect to your PC using an iPad

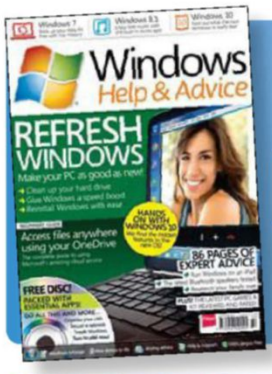
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12 Essential tips to get Windows 7 back up to speed



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THE DEEP Follow our guide to exploring the sea and a trip to the beach will never be the same again

World wide wet

Explore the fascinating world beneath the waves

Discover how to delve into the deepest chasms of the seven seas without even getting your toes wet

Our oceans make up more than a third of the planet's surface, yet we've explored just five per cent of them. We know more about the surface of the moon, and even Mars, than we do about our seas. The fact that we have such rich, unmapped ecosystems on our doorsteps (or shorelines) is intriguing, and amazing new discoveries are made on an almost daily basis.

Nature and science society National Geographic's ocean pages (http://ocean.nationalgeographic.com/ocean) are a great starting point for learning about the world's watery bodies. Here you'll find some amazing photographs taken both above and below the surface, as well as the latest news on expeditions to the murky depths, and the society's efforts to protect coastlines and marine creatures.

America's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration runs a site for children (http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/kids), and it's packed with fun activities so kids can learn about the seas. As its name suggests, www.seasky.org provides a friendly and easily navigable guide to the worlds above and below us.

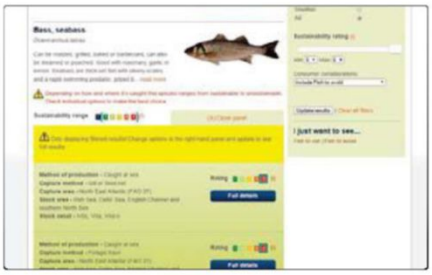
Google has helped out with mapping the oceans. Its underwater Streetview project (www.google.com/maps/views/streetview/oceans) has taken in amazing aquatic sights around the world, including the Belize Barrier Reef System, Australia's Great Barrier Reef and Sian Ka'an in Mexico. Browsing these incredible images is the closest most of us will get to diving into the pristine waters.

> "It's the closest most of us will get to diving into the pristine waters"

Finally, check out the BBC's dedicated Oceans site (www.bbc.co.uk/oceans/progcast), which was created to tie in with its astounding *Ocean* documentary series in 2008. Despite its age, there's still a lot of fascinating behind-the-scenes content here, including information on the featured oceans, the presenters and the incredible discoveries the team made while filming the series.

FISHFINDER Search for sustainable seafood

One of the biggest challenges to the ocean is overfishing. This can have a catastrophic effect on the delicate food chain in the oceans, resulting in the near-devastation of entire species. It's not all bad news, though – some species are thriving, such as Arctic char and catfish. The UK's Marine Conservation Society has a guide at www.fishonline.org, and it may even encourage you to give up cod and chips in favour of something more sustainable.



PERCH SEARCH Enter the name of a fish in the search box to find out if it's sustainable.



BASS BROWSER Click on 'Fish to eat' and 'Fish to avoid' to see what's hot and what's not.



PRAWN AGAIN Each month the site adds a new recipe for one type of sustainable fish.

The Knowledge...



802.11ad

Is that a foreign postcode?
Probably, somewhere in the world, yes, but it's also the name given to a new wireless technology that promises to deliver five times faster speeds than the current best option. It's been in the pipeline for a while, but Samsung reckons it's finally overcome the technology's biggest problem.

Which is?
Walls. The technology uses 60GHz radio bands, as opposed to the 2.4GHz and 5GHz bands used by current standards. This means that data can be sent and received at far faster rates, but the wireless signal is also more likely to be severely disrupted by brick walls.

So how has Samsung solved this?
With some very special antennas. Samsung's technology uses beamforming, which shapes signals so that they are more penetrative and powerful: think along the lines of the difference between a hose spraying or streaming water. Devices connected to an 802.11ad network will locate one another in physical space, and adjust the signal to be more powerful.

What sort of speeds can I expect?
Samsung reckons it's going to be pretty amazing, with maximum speeds of 4.6Gbps, which will allow users to send a 1GB movie file in under three seconds. In turn this could change the way we consume media, with the ability to stream ultra-high definition 4K content from a mobile phone to a screen without any sign of lag or compression.

Sounds great. When can I get it?
Surprisingly soon. Despite the fact that Samsung has only just announced the technology, it believes that it will be ready for deployment in the wild early next year. It may take a while longer to be adopted on a larger scale though, and it's worth remembering that it's going to be a bit pointless if you've got a slow (ie British) internet connection.



HENRY WINCHESTER
TECH EXPERT

WINDOWS INSIDER
EXPOSING YOUR PC'S SECRETS

Windows Vista

Change your pointer

Windows is hugely customisable, but the humble mouse pointer is one of those bits of the operating system not many people realise they can change. To do so, click 'Start', followed by 'Control Panel > Hardware > Mouse'. Now click the 'Pointers' tab and you'll see a number of different options to choose from, including magnified and inverted, both of which may be easier for you to see than the default pointer. Here you can also turn a shadow on the cursor on or off. For more customisation options you can download new and interesting cursors from the internet – visit http://customize.org/cursor for lots of well-designed pointers, and instructions for downloading and installing them.





Windows 7

Change your user picture

Your Windows user picture, which appears beside your name at the top of the Start menu, is usually something you choose when you first set up your computer and then forget about. However, it can become a little boring to see the same labrador puppy or orange flower whenever you turn on your computer. It's easy to change this picture to something a little more personal: click the 'Start' button, then choose 'Control Panel > User Accounts and Family Safety > User Accounts'. Now click 'Change your picture' and either choose one of the images supplied, or click 'Browse for more pictures' to pick a snap from your computer.

Windows 8



Pin to the Start screen

One of the biggest problems with Windows 8's Start screen is that it initially only displays the icons Microsoft *thinks* you need, rather than the ones you want. There's an easy solution for this, though – simply click the arrow in the lower left of the screen to see all your programs, then right-click on the relevant icon and select 'Pin to Start' and it'll show up on the Start screen. You can also pin websites here by firing up Internet Explorer, browsing to the website you wish to bookmark, clicking the 'Settings' icon and choosing 'Add site to apps'. Follow the above process to move it to the Start screen.

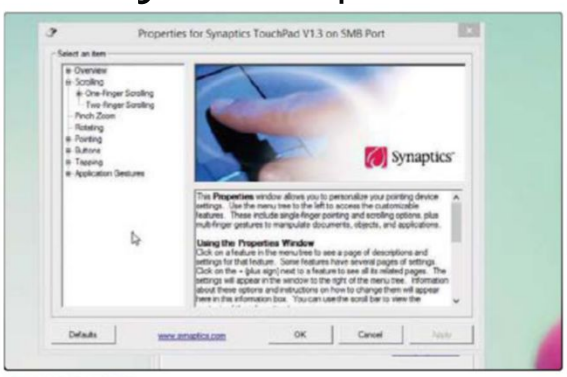
Struggling to get something to work? Need a tip?
Then email us your woes (to windowsmagazine@futurenet.com with the subject line 'Windows Insider') and we'll share your perfect Windows tweaks in a future issue.

Tip of the month | Synaptic feedback

Enable gestures on almost any computer

Make the most of your laptop's standard touchpad with Synaptics' universal suite of multi-touch tools

Multi-touch gestures can make using your laptop a lot easier. This clever technology means that you can use two-finger swipes on your touchpad to scroll up and down webpages, and pinch to zoom in and out of websites. Synaptics – the company that makes the majority of laptop touchpads – has made it available for older laptops that may not have supported it in the first place. To set it up, visit www.synaptics.com/en/drivers.php and choose the Windows drivers. Once it's installed you'll see a small animated green icon in the lower right. Right-click this and choose 'Pointing device Properties > Device settings > Settings'. Here you can turn gestures on and off under the Scrolling, Pointing and Application Gestures headings, and once you're used to them you'll be flinging your way through websites and documents.



TOUCHY-FEELY Enabling multi-touch gestures with Synaptics' toolkit can make your laptop feel like a whole new machine

Everyone's talking about...

What's in Windows 10

After the misstep that was Windows 8, Microsoft seems back on track with its next operating system

Microsoft has announced that the latest version of Windows, dubbed Windows 10, will be released in late 2015. Sitting somewhere between the much-maligned Windows 8 and the much-loved Windows 7, Windows 10 will be available across a range of devices, from 4-inch phones to computers linked to 80-inch displays.

It's more critical than ever that Microsoft gets Windows 10 right. Windows 8's poor reception combined with its usability issues means that it hasn't taken off as Microsoft hoped it would. Windows 7 is still the world's most popular desktop operating system, according to Net Applications, with a 52 per cent market share. Embarrassingly for Microsoft, Windows 8 is installed on just 12 per cent of PCs, while the 13-year-old Windows XP runs on 24 per cent.



Microsoft is taking a step back and making Windows 10 more like Windows 7. The Start menu – which was replaced by Windows 8's Start screen – will return, complete with all your recently-accessed programs and a search bar. The new Task View will make switching between apps and programs even easier, and multiple desktops will mean demanding users can run two virtual computers in one.

Despite its poor reception, we rather liked Windows 8. Its colourful, blocky design went against the more finicky layout of Windows 7 and Apple's OS X, while the Start screen and Windows Store were ideal for kids and people who found themselves lost in Windows 7's myriad options. These will remain in Windows 10: apps will be displayed on the Start menu alongside full programs, and you'll be able to run these apps in windows rather than full screen.

The ability to snap Windows into two halves of your monitor – known as Aero Snap – has been a feature of Windows since 7, but Windows 10 will take things a big further by letting you snap a program to each corner of the screen, which is a boon for multitaskers with big monitors.

Better still are rumours that the new operating system will be available free of charge, if not just for Windows 8 owners, then everyone. It could be just the ticket Microsoft needs to get on the next train of innovative technology.

THE 60-SECOND QUIZ

Pens at the ready, your time starts now!

1 Google is trialling a video tool to connect people with whom?
A Firemen
B Doctors
C Deep sea divers

2 Minessotan Anna Stoehr lied about her age to join Facebook. How old is she?
A Two
B 12
C 114

3 Scientists have created a battery that does what?
A Bends to any shape
B Beeps if it needs charging
C Warns users if it's overheating

4 Google's new cable between Brazil and the US will resist what?
A Crabs
B Sharks
C Kaiju

5 What is the unique selling point of Honeywell's thermostat?
A It's voice-activated
B It scans your body temperature
C It heats electric blankets

6 A proposed free school will use what to teach kids?
A Video conferencing
B Robots
C Videogames

Answers 1B. 2C. 3C. 4B. 5A. 6C

Download this...

One Hero

www.onehero.ca

One Hero is a great example of how the web, and its HTML5 programming language, can be used to tell a story in a unique and powerful manner. It works much like a scrollable comic book, and features a heroic motorcyclist attempting to stop an ongoing mutant invasion perpetuated by a madman. Movement and sound are used to make it come to life, and it occasionally throws game-like interactivity into the mix.

It's all been created to serve a heroic purpose, too – it's a promotion to get young men to donate stem cells to Canadian Blood Services. In fact, the story itself a clever analogy for the experiences of victim who needs a stem cell donor, with the 'cure' for the invasion being a vial of blood. It won't take you more than 10 minutes to complete, but it's a great way to experience the future of web-based entertainment.



THE ONE AND ONLY This nifty website uses sound, images and interactivity to spin a yarn

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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE
December 2014
19
FRIDAY

Facts & figures

Henry Winchester reveals a host of fascinating digital facts

20,000...

...Britons have asked for results to be removed from Google searches since the introduction of its 'right to be forgotten' program earlier this year. The system was introduced after a European court of justice ruling on internet privacy, and it means that anyone can ask for outdated or irrelevent results to be removed. 145,000 appeals have been made across Europe so far.

Do you spend more on technology than anything else?

According to a survey conducted by US broadcaster CNBC, **49 per cent** of Americans have economised so they can spend more on technology. A third have cut back on entertainment such as movies and eating out, **20 per cent** have curbed spending on clothing, and **11 per cent** purchased less food. Worryingly, **10 per cent** reported that they'd spent less on healthcare due to their obsession with gizmos.

WWW.BBC.CO.UK FACTS

The BBC launched its first website, the BBC Networking Club on **11 May 1994**. It required members to pay a £25 joining fee and £12 monthly membership.

It registered www.bbc.co.uk in **1996** and launched its first publicly-accessible website.

The BBC launched its news site a year later. www.bbc.co.uk/news currently attracts **40 million** unique users a week.

In **1999**, the BBC bought the www.bbc.com domain name, previously owned by Boston Business Computing, for a whopping **$375,000**.

As the BBC's online content continued to grow, the site became harder to navigate. On **7 November 2001** it relaunched its content under the BBCi umbrella.

In **2007** the BBC introduced on-site advertisements for visitors from outside the UK, who don't pay a licence fee.

On **Christmas Day 2007** the BBC's iPlayer service launched, although it was only available to Windows XP users to begin with.

On **24 January 2011** the BBC announced plans to cut its online budget by 25 per cent (or £34 million), following complaints from competing broadcasters that it was attracting too many of their visitors.

In **2013** www.bbc.co.uk was the most popular site in Europe with 64 million visitors in January of that year. However, it's since fallen behind Twitter and Google.

With **3.63 million** requests for playback, *Sherlock: The Empty Hearse* has become the most popular programme on iPlayer.

WHERE DO PEOPLE THINK THE INTERNET RESIDES?

3% think it's in **their device**.

4% say it's at **DARPA**, the US military defence research agency.

8% reckon it's in **supercomputers**.

10% believe it lives in **'the cloud'**.

25% don't know.

51% correctly say it's in **network-connected data centres**.

SOURCE: TATA COMMUNICATIONS



...is Microsoft's ranking in Interbrand's annual list of the world's biggest brands. Apple, Google, Coca-Cola and IBM all rank higher, with the top two valued at over $100 billion for the first time ever. Interbrand recognises Microsoft's attempts to keep up with the ever-changing world of technology. "Microsoft also repositioned from 'Windows first' to 'cloud and mobile first', marking a departure from the company's legacy strategy in desktop software," it said.

81 MILLION...

...people have listened to at least part of U2's album *Songs of Innocence*, which was given away free by Apple to celebrate the release of the iPhone 6. 26 million people went on to download the album to their iTunes library. "To help put this into perspective, prior to this, 14 million customers had purchased music from U2 since the opening of the iTunes store in 2003," said Apple's vice-president Eddy Cue.



WHAT'S THE BEST MOBILE NETWORK IN LONDON?

London is home to some of the world's biggest tech companies, but its mobile standards leave a lot to be desired. Network analysis firm Global Wireless Solutions tested the capital's networks by running high-level tests while out and about. It found that Vodafone is the best network for 3G connectivity, while EE offers the best 4G coverage. One in three mobile internet tasks and one in seven voice calls failed during testing on moving trains, and St Pancras Station was found to be a total mobile signal blackspot.



HOW HIGH IS MOUNT SNOWDON?

The tallest mountain in Wales has been recorded by Ordnance Survey as measuring 1,085 metres above sea level. However, intrepid technology-equipped ramblers and climbers have found that their GPS devices record the summit at 1,086 metres. Ordnance Survey needn't worry, though – the cause of the 100cm discrepancy is simply due to a man-made plinth at the top of the mountain.

REFRESH WINDOWS

Don't let your PC slow you down. ***Ben Andrews*** *reveals some essential tips to get Windows 7 back up to speed*

Remember when you first powered up your shiny new Windows 7 PC and how quickly it sprang into life? Chances are if it's been well used, things will no longer seem quite so nippy. Well fear not, because you shouldn't need to fork out for a new machine just yet. With the aid of various Windows tweaks and some software tools, your computer can be restored to its former glory.

In this feature, you'll discover why your once speedy computer is beginning to feel the strain, and learn the best ways to unshackle it from this virtual ball and chain. You may already be familiar with some of the techniques you can use to show your PC some love – whether it's uninstalling unused software or simply protecting it with an up-to-date antivirus program – but we'll reveal plenty more Windows 7 tune-ups that'll help you keep your computer in tip-top condition.

Doubling your PC's speed isn't a fine art and you won't need a degree in technical wizardry, either. One of the easiest and most effective ways to get your PC back on track is simply to keep it free of clutter. Just as you'd struggle to find a document in a filing cabinet bursting with papers, a hard drive stuffed full of unnecessary files isn't going to be the fastest environment to work in. Once Windows has been given a thorough tidy, you'll find out how a humble USB flash drive can boost its performance, and we'll reveal hidden settings to deactivate some of Window's 7's most speed-sapping visual effects.

Armed with these tricks you can spend less time staring at loading screens and get on with exploring the best bits of Windows 7. Most of the techniques here can be mastered with ease, and what's more, they won't cost you a single penny.




Fn Lock
Insert
Delete
Home
End
PgUp
PgDn
Backspace
Num Lock
Enter
Home

THE USUAL SUSPECTS

Put these easy tricks into practice and you'll already be well on the way to a faster computer

Clean your hard disk

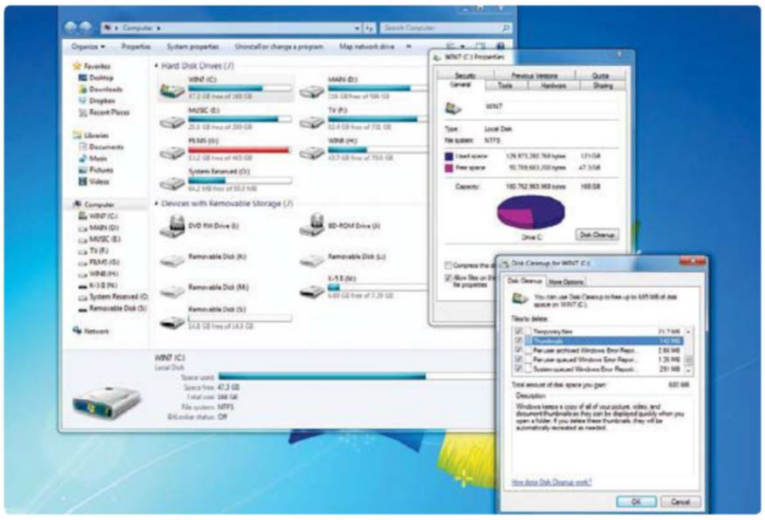
Removing unnecessary files will really help speed up Windows

Improving your PC's performance can just be a matter of giving it a spring clean. Leave the feather duster in the cupboard though, as this housework only requires some deft mousework.

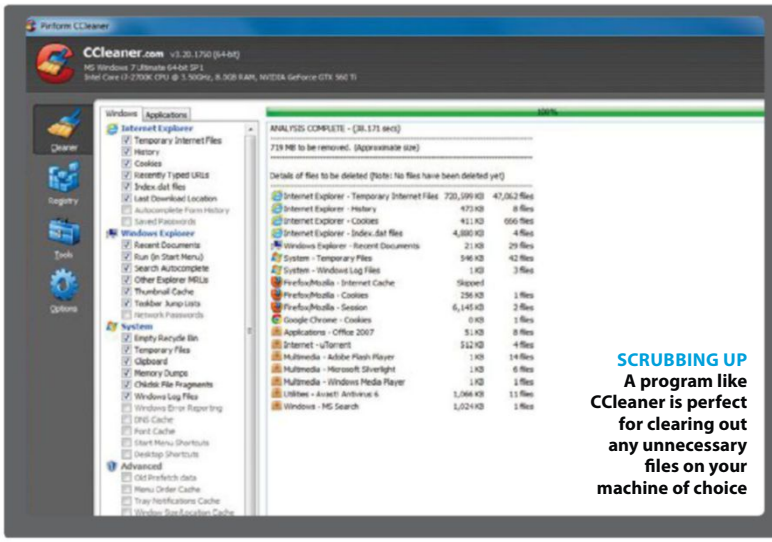
Click 'Start > Computer' and right-click on the hard drive where your Windows files reside (in most cases you'll find them in the C: drive). Next, click the 'Properties' option to display a small window featuring a blue and purple pie chart. Notice the button next to this labelled 'Disk Cleanup' – clicking this will reveal various file categories you can cleanse.

Generally any item on the list can be ticked for deletion, but give your Recycle Bin a quick once-over to make sure there's nothing important lurking inside that might be purged accidentally. Leaving the 'Thumbnails' box unchecked is also wise, as this saves your computer the trouble of regenerating image thumbnails when you next view your photo albums. Click 'OK' and Windows will commence the cleanup, free some hard drive space and make your PC run a little faster now it's shed some of those extra virtual pounds.

SHED THE WEIGHT
Cleaning out your hard drive is one of the best ways to add extra speed to your PC or laptop



To achieve a deeper clean, click the 'Disk Cleanup' button next the pie chart again, but switch to the More Options tab. The upper 'Clean up' button opens the 'Uninstall or change a program' window where you can scour your computer for unnecessary software. Abandoned games, disused printer software and unnecessary web browser toolbars are all worth uninstalling. Back on the Disk cleanup window, the lower 'Clean up' button will delete Windows System Restore points apart from the most recent, potentially releasing gigabytes of storage space.



SCRUBBING UP
A program like CCleaner is perfect for clearing out any unnecessary files on your machine of choice

THE ULTIMATE DISK CLEANUP

CCleaner will tidy up Windows files plus the leftovers from other programs, too

The Windows Disk Cleanup function does a pretty good job of clearing clutter, but CCleaner (on your free disc) will remove even more unnecessary Windows files and tidy up your existing programs.

All you have to do to set CCleaner on this comprehensive cleaning mission is to click the 'Analyze' button to see just how much rubbish CCleaner can find, followed by the 'Run Cleaner' button that completes the job. If you'd also like to tidy up the very bowels of Windows itself, select the Registry tab on the left and repeat the same process.

A word of warning though: while CCleaner is preconfigured to keep some useful content, it's worth checking what the software is about to be deleted.

Defragment your hard drive

Once you've had a data clearout, defragment your remaining files to ensure fast loading times

Fragmented files are files that have been chopped up to fill vacant spaces on your hard drive, rather than being saved in one piece. Windows needs time to reconstruct these files when you come to load them, slowing your PC down.

Defragmentation rearranges the contents of your hard drive, creating large enough areas of free space for files to be stored as complete units that can be opened as fast as possible.

Thankfully, defragmenting your hard drive is really easy to do. Click 'Start > Computer', right-click on the drive's icon and select the 'Properties' option, followed by the Tools tab in the next window. Press the button in the middle labelled 'Defragment now' and select the drive in question from the list. You can now start the defrag process by clicking on the 'Defragment disk' button.



Limit the number of start-up programs

The more programs which automatically load when you start your computer, the slower it gets

Many software programs have an annoying habit of assuming you want them to load and run in the background every time you start your PC. This can mean it takes longer to turn on and all those programs running behind the scenes sap a lot of power.

Windows does, however, include a useful gadget to let you regain control of which programs automatically start up when Windows loads. It's called the System Configuration tool and you can access it by clicking 'Start', typing **msconfig** and pressing [Enter]. Switching to the Start-up tab reveals a list of programs that can be deselected from the start-up list. Most of these can be unticked without issue, but ensure items relating to antivirus and firewall software are left enabled for automatic start-up. Finally, click 'Apply' and restart your computer for these new changes to take a positive effect.



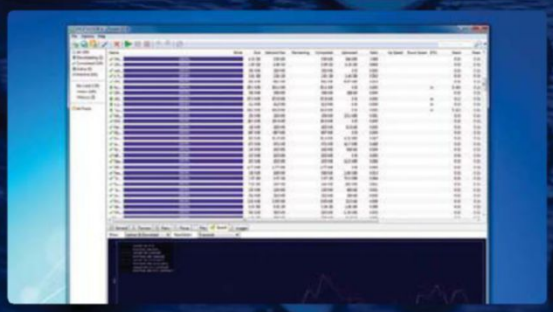
NET NASTIES

The web breeds speed-sapping software. Avoid them all with these tips



1 Viruses & malware

If you often get suspicious pop-ups in Windows or your web browser homepage keeps changing itself, your computer may be playing host to some malicious software. Show it the door with Malwarebytes Free (www.malwarebytes.org).



2 Peer-to-peer file sharing software

Although not a threat in its own right, file sharing software can open the floodgates to viruses and malware. If you do use such software, pay close attention to the filenames you download and avoid anything ending ZIP, RAR or EXE.



3 Miracle cures

Beware of 'free' software claiming to instantly speed up your PC. Some programs are legit, but many make false claims that your computer is at death's door, offering to bring it back from the brink with the aid of your credit card. Avoid them at all costs.

QUICK TURBO TRICKS

A clean and tidy computer is all well and good, but adding extra performance is even better...

Windows 7 ReadyBoost

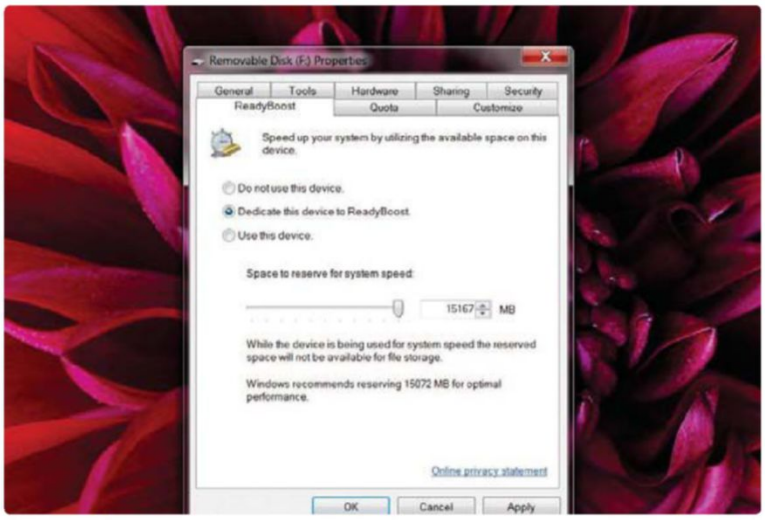
Give a spare USB flash drive a new lease of life and use it to boost Windows 7

If a name is anything to go by, ReadyBoost certainly sounds like it could deliver in the performance stakes. This Windows 7 feature utilises a USB flash drive to help speed up your computer's hard drive when it loads frequently-used software and files.

ReadyBoost won't work with any old flash drive though, as it needs at least a 256MB capacity and be fast enough to meet Windows' requirements. To see if you've already got something suitably quick, plug the drive in, click 'Start > Computer' and right-click on the drive's icon, then select 'Format' from the menu and leave any formatting options unchanged. Formatting will delete any data on your flash drive and prepare it for use with ReadyBoost, so if there are any files stored here you don't want to lose, back them up first.

Once the format is complete, right-click on your hard drive again, but this time select 'Properties', followed by the ReadyBoost tab.

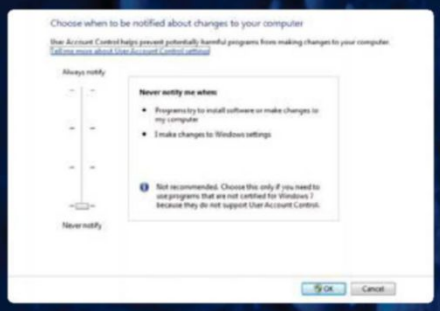
GET BOOSTED
The kind of results you'll get from using ReadyBoost will differ from PC to PC, so see what it can do for you

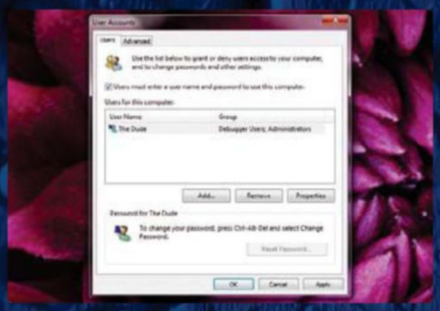


Should you be met by a message stating that this device cannot be used for ReadyBoost – try clicking the 'Test again' button, but if Windows still won't play ball, it's time to buy a faster flash drive. Next, select 'Dedicate this drive to ReadyBoost' and click 'Apply'.

As Windows learns the software you use most, loading times will gradually reduce. Older PCs with 512MB of RAM will reap the greatest speed increase, and while machines with 1GB or more RAM can benefit from ReadyBoost, don't expect to be blown away by it.

Step-by-step | Three easy tweaks







1 Disable User Account Control
This Windows security feature relentlessly asks your permission every time a program tries to make changes to your PC. To disable it, type **UAC** in the Start menu search box, press [Enter] and set the slider to 'Never notify'.

2 Activate auto-logon
If your computer only has a single user account, did you know you can skip the logon screen and load straight to the desktop? Click 'Start', type **run** and press [Enter]. Type **control userpasswords2**, click 'OK' and uncheck the tickbox.

3 Check your power plan
Sounds obvious, but it's worth clicking 'Start > Control Panel > Hardware and Sound > Power Options' to ensure your computer is set to the speediest High Performance plan. Laptops tend to revert back to Power Saver when unplugged.

Update your graphics drivers

Outdated graphics card drivers can significantly reduce performance

Whether you're an avid gamer or just enjoy an occasional HD video, keeping your computer's graphics drivers up to date is vital.

The graphics hardware in your PC is likely to come from one of three main manufacturers. The way to tell which one is to type **dxdiag** in the Start menu search box and press [Enter]. A notification window may appear, click 'No' to dismiss it and access Windows 7's DirectX Diagnostic Tool. Switch to the 'Display' tab and in the upper-left corner your graphics hardware maker will be revealed.

Each manufacturer has automatic driver detection tools to help you upgrade to the most up-to-date drivers for your hardware. Visit http://support.amd.com, www.geforce.co.uk/drivers or http://downloadcenter.intel.com for more info.

Before you install new drivers, it's best practice to uninstall your existing ones by clicking 'Start > Computer', then 'Uninstall or change a program'.





Adjust visual settings

Much of Windows 7's visual flair can be disabled to free up some power reserves

Windows 7 may be a few years old, but it still looks the part thanks to its animated effects, drop shadows under each window and much more visual eye candy.

On modern PCs you can crank these effects to the max and they shouldn't slow you down, but an older machine which may have only just met Windows 7's minimum hardware requirements when new could now be struggling to make the grade. Help it out by disabling some of Windows' pretty but non-essential frills.

You can do this by clicking 'Start', typing **windows performance** and pressing [Enter]. Selecting the 'Adjust for best performance' option will disable all visual effects to give you the biggest performance boost. Click 'Apply', but if you now come across something that looks a little too crude like jagged font edges or jerky list scrolling, revisit this menu and re-tick the options.

Stay familiar with Windows Task Manager

This Windows tool isn't just useful for ending unresponsive programs – use it to monitor resource-hungry software as well

Now your hard drive has been cleansed of unnecessary files and you've vetted which programs load at startup, it's a good idea to keep track of what software is left running to ensure nothing is hogging an unfair share of computing resources. The good old Windows Task Manager is one of the most reliable tools for keeping you in the picture.



Access it by simply right-clicking an empty area of the Taskbar and select the 'Start Task Manager' option. Switch to the Processes tab and click the column label 'CPU' to arrange each active program and Windows service in order of which is using the most processor power. Ignore the 'System Idle Process' entry if this appears at the top of the list and instead check whether anything else is consistently ranking high on this power-hunger scale. Clicking the 'Memory' column header will also reveal any programs which may have an appetite for large amounts of RAM.

If you do come across a program that seems to be putting undue strain on your machine, head over to the software manufacturer's website to see if any updates have been released to tackle the problem.

Next time you hear your hard drive crunching away of its own accord, bring up the Task Manager again, but move to the Performance tab and click the 'Resource Monitor' button. Next, select the Disk tab and click the column header 'Total (B/sec)' and any software monopolising your hard drive will be exposed at the top of the list.

ADVANCED HACKS

When quick fixes aren't enough, Windows 7 still has plenty of clever ways to regain some speed

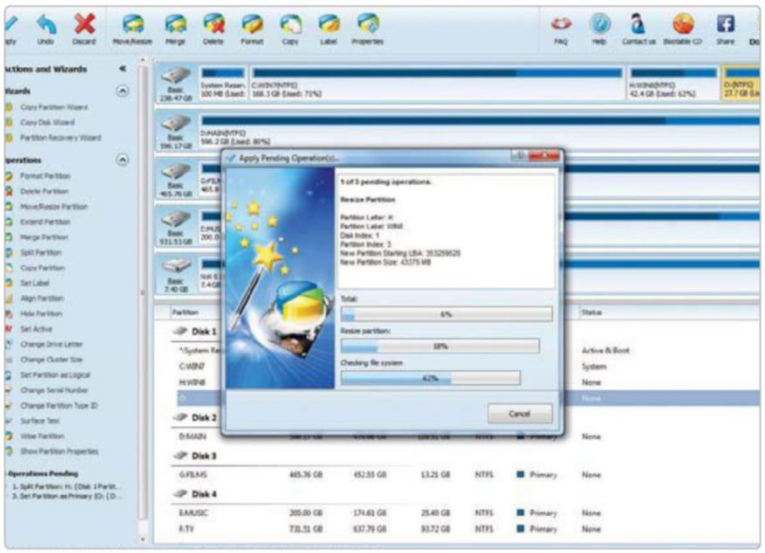
Partition your hard drive

Speed up Windows and your software by running them on their own virtual hard drive

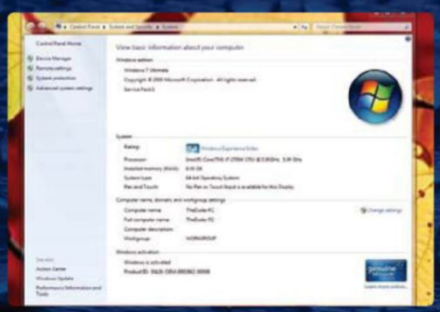
On many hard drives, your documents, photos and music are saved to the same area where your Windows operating system and software are located. Defragmentation can help organise everything, but having all your personal files crammed alongside Windows can really slow the whole system down. The process of partitioning solves the problem, enabling your Windows operating system and software to be digitally fenced off on a streamlined virtual hard drive. Windows 7 itself can create a partition, but MiniTool Partition Wizard (www.partitionwizard.com) is a free alternative program that's more advanced, yet easier to use.

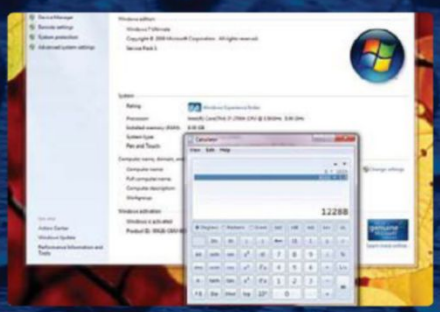
Once installed and loaded, notice the bar graph representing the available space on your hard drive. Right-click on the section where Windows and your files are stored (usually the C: drive) and select the 'Split' option. Inside the new window, move the slider to the point where you'd like your partition, but remember to leave at least 20GB of free space with Windows to allow for future software installation. Next, click 'OK', followed by the 'Apply' button in the top-left of the main window. The partition will now be created and another virtual hard drive will have magically appeared in your Windows Explorer menu for you to transfer your personal files onto.

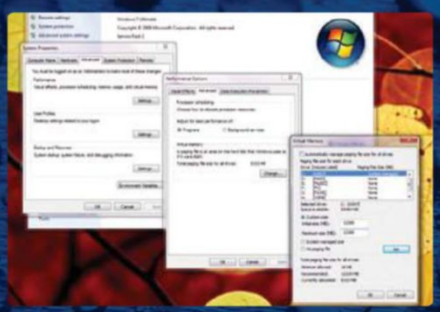
PARTITION TIME
Dividing your files from Windows and software apps is great, but regular defragmentation is important, too



Step-by-step | Increase your virtual memory







1 RAM on your hard drive?
When your computer runs out of memory (RAM), it borrows a portion of your hard drive to use as virtual memory. To improve performance by allocating more virtual memory, click 'Start', right-click on 'Computer' and select 'Properties'.

2 Do your sums
See the amount of 'Installed memory (RAM)' you have listed here? Multiply this figure by 1,024 and then multiply the new number by 1.5. Make a note of the answer, before clicking the 'Advanced system settings' link on the left.

3 Complete the change
On the Advanced tab, click the uppermost 'Settings' button, followed by the 'Change' button. Uncheck the top tickbox, choose the 'Custom size' option and enter your previously noted number into both boxes. Click 'Set > OK' to finish.

Streamline any Windows services

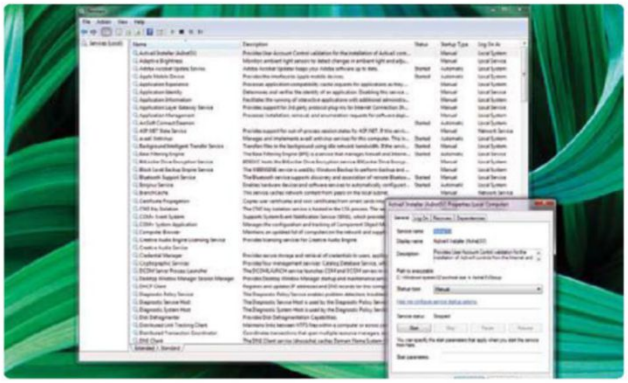
Control which Windows services are able to take a share in processing power

We've already used the System Configuration tool to stop unnecessary programs starting up when you load Windows, but it's also possible to take this concept a stage further and prevent individual elements of Windows itself from using precious power resources.

To free up some extra speed this way, type **services.msc** in the Start menu search box and press [Enter]. You're now greeted with a long list of services Windows may use to operate your computer. It looks daunting at first, but notice the Description column, which adds a little background information about each service name.

Clicking the 'Status' column will order the list so you can see which services are currently active, then it's a matter of scrutinising these to see if any can be disabled. As a rule of thumb, if you're not absolutely sure what a particular service does, simply leave it alone.

This isn't to say other services can't be tweaked, but we'd recommend visiting www.blackviper.com and finding the Windows 7 Service Pack 1 Service Configurations chart to see which ones can be altered.





Tweak the Registry

Making the right adjustments to the Windows Registry can yield results

Windows 7 has some nifty time-saving features, such as the mini preview windows which pop up if you slide your mouse cursor over a Taskbar icon. By default, there's a small delay between when you point at an icon and anything happening, which can get frustrating if you preview windows frequently. To speed this up, click 'Start', type **regedit** in the search box and press [Enter]. This gives you access to the Windows Registry, the secret control panel where you can fine tune your OS.

Using the folder menu pane on the left, double-click 'HKEY_CURRENT_USER', then 'Control Panel' and finally 'Mouse'. Now find 'MouseHoverTime' in the list displayed in the right-hand pane and double-click it to reveal a new window. Here the number 400 in the 'Value data' box represents the millisecond delay between you hovering over a Taskbar icon and a preview window appearing. Changing this to a lower figure like 100 will speed things up nicely. Click 'OK', restart your computer and hey presto, faster Taskbar previews.

OVERCLOCKING

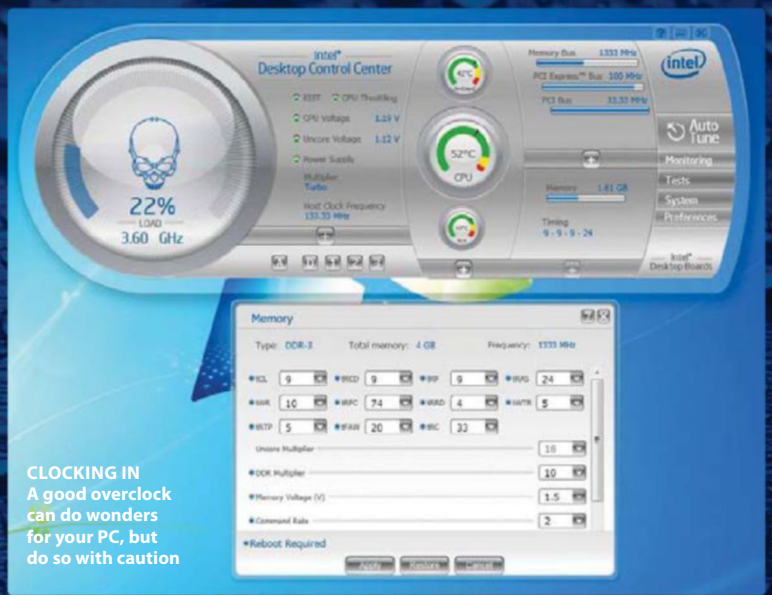
Want your PC to perform even better than new? Then it's time to overclock your machine

Just as a car engine can be tuned to run faster, the same principle can be applied to computer processors. Manufacturers like Intel and AMD typically set the speed of their chips quite conservatively, but the art of overclocking can unlock any extra performance potential.

To give it a go, you first need to know the component specification of your computer. CPU-Z (www.cpuid.com) is a free and very useful software tool which tells you exactly what's under the bonnet, so you can determine whether your machine is ripe for overclocking.

The tuning process itself can be performed via desktop software or through the PC's BIOS, but often there's a huge range of options available to tweak. Alter the wrong one or try boosting things too far and your PC could crash or overheat – and don't expect a warranty to pick up the pieces, either.

Doing the right kind of research is vital for successful overclocking – for more information you can check out our sister website, www.techradar.com.



CLOCKING IN
A good overclock can do wonders for your PC, but do so with caution

A LAST RESORT

Windows 7's performance-enhancing tricks will usually rescue a slow PC. Here's what to do if they don't...

Reinstall Windows

Wiping your PC and reinstalling Windows can be the most effective way to boost it

If you've tried clearing the clutter, vanquishing viruses and making performance tweaks, but your computer is still on a go-slow, it's time to return it to its former glory by reinstalling Windows. This will delete everything from your hard drive though, so if there are any files, emails or even Internet Explorer Favourites you don't want to lose, it's essential to back these up. Take a look at the step-by-step guide below to learn how to do this in a little more detail.

Know your methods

There are two main methods for reinstalling Windows, but we'll start with the most common procedure for computers made by companies such as Dell or Acer. These manufacturers often allocate a small area of your hard drive to store a duplicate of the computer's original Windows 7 data, which can now be used to overwrite any clogged Windows files.

To access this preserved copy of Windows, restart your computer and as soon as it begins to fire back up, repeatedly tap [F8] until a menu entitled 'Advanced boot options' appears. Select the 'Repair your computer' option and press [Enter]. At this point, the computer's recovery software may start to kick in automatically. If it doesn't, continue until you reach the stage where you're required to select your usual Windows account name from a drop-down list and enter the associated password as per normal. You'll now be met with a list of various options, but the one we're looking for activates the PC manufacturer's recovery software and is normally the last link to appear on the list.

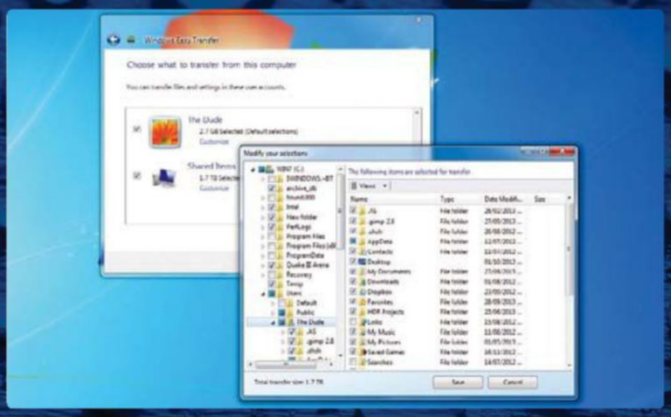


START AFRESH
It may sound a little drastic, but a reinstallation of Windows 7 can give your poor old PC a real boost

It's now a matter of following the specific instructions for your recovery program, but if given the choice between preserving new and changed software or wiping everything back to exact factory specifications, plump for the latter. This way any undesirable digital

Step-by-step | Back up your files





1 Load Windows Easy Transfer

You won't need to shell out for pricey backup software as Windows 7 can do the job itself, but an external hard drive or a high-capacity USB flash drive is a must for temporarily storing your files. When you're ready, type **easy transfer** into the Start menu's search box and press [Enter] to load Windows 7's Easy Transfer backup tool.

2 Select the files to keep

Windows assumes you're transferring files from an old to a new computer, rather than a newly restored one, but go ahead and select the 'Old computer' option. The software will now search for files to back up, however if it finds too much for the capacity of your external storage, click the 'Customise' link and deselect files you could do without.

A SPEEDY UPGRADE

Okay, so this trick isn't free, but it's has the potential for a hefty speed increase

If you're going to the trouble of reinstalling Windows, it makes sense to consider what it's being installed on. Nowadays, you don't have to put up with an old hard disk drive chugging away just to load a web page, as new SSD (solid state drive) technology really could double your loading speed.

Acting like a scaled-up USB flash drive operating inside your computer, this speedy storage can be had from a reasonable £50, and it's also possible to continue using your existing hard drive for storing your personal files. With Windows and software at home on their own super-fast SSD, loading times will be slashed and your PC should feel considerably more responsive.

Switching to an SSD is one of the most significant performance upgrades you can make to a PC. For an installation guide, search www.techradar.com for 'How to install a hard drive' and skip to stage 2.



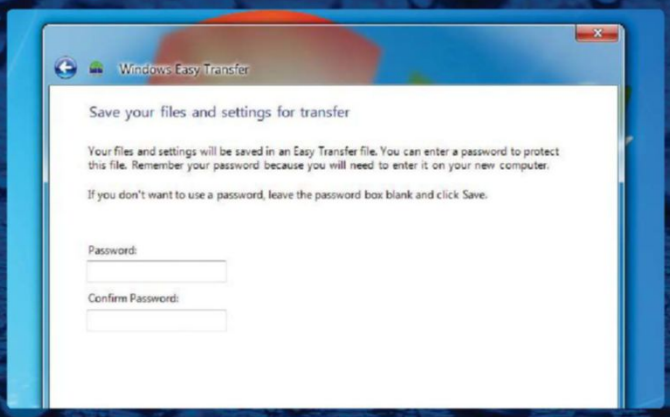
HIT TOP SPEED
A SSD will do wonders for the speed and performance of your PC

intruders which may have set up camp on your computer over the years will be evicted.

Reinstallation with a disc

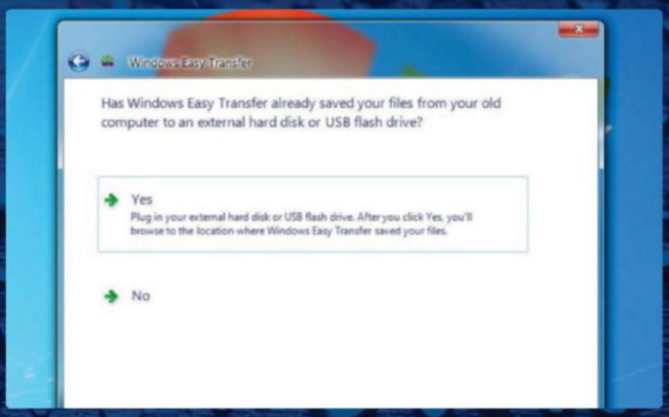
The second method for reinstalling Windows requires a genuine Windows 7 installation DVD, which you may have been given if your PC was built by a low-volume manufacturer. To use this disc, first back up your files then restart your computer, but instead of pressing [F8] on start-up, tap [F12] to load the DVD. When prompted, click the large 'Install now' button and continue until you're asked which type of installation you want. Pick the 'Custom (advanced)' option and you'll now have the choice of where to install Windows. Choose the partition where Windows is currently installed (usually the C: drive) and click the 'Drive options' link beneath. Double-check you've highlighted the correct partition, select the 'Format' option and when this finishes, click 'Next' to commence the main Windows reinstallation process.

You're nearly ready to enjoy your newly-restored, fighting fit PC, but there are a couple more hurdles to clear. During the Windows set-up process you'll have to enter your very own Windows product key. This is usually found on a sticker attached to your computer, or on the original packaging of your Windows disc. Finally, once you're back online, be sure to regularly visit the Windows Update web page to apply essential security updates and add any missing hardware drivers. ■



3 Save the backup

Next you'll be given the option to password protect your backup file, or you can head straight to saving the data to your external storage. Depending on the amount you've selected to back up, the process may take a while. When complete, be sure to unplug your backup storage from the computer before reinstalling Windows.



4 Restore your files

Once Windows is reinstalled and your computer is rearing to go, open Windows Easy Transfer again, but now tell it that this is your new computer. Plug your external storage back in and direct the software to the backup file it initially created. Finally, sit back put the kettle on and let Window's restore your files to their previous locations. And that's it, you're done!

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LC980 / 1100 Set of 4	£11.99
LC985 Black	£3.99
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No.57 Colour 24ml	£12.99
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No.88XL C/M/Y 17ml	£8.99
No.110 Colour 12ml	£10.99
No.300XL Black 18ml	£14.99
No.300XL Colour 18ml	£16.99
No.336 Black 10ml	£7.99
No.337 Black 24ml	£10.99
No.338 Black 24ml	£10.99
No.339 Black 34ml	£12.99
No.342 Colour 12ml	£10.99
No.343 Colour 21ml	£12.99
No.344 Colour 21ml	£14.99
No.348 Photo 21ml	£12.99
No.350XL Black 34ml	£14.99
No.351XL Colour 21ml	£16.99
No.363 Black 20ml	£6.99
No.363 C/M/Y/PC/PM 6ml	£4.99
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No.57 Colour 17ml	£28.99
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No.301 Colour 3ml	£11.99
No.301B/C Combo	£17.99
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No.337 Black 11ml	£18.99
No.338 Black 11ml	£18.99
No.339 Black 21ml	£25.99
No.342 Colour 5ml	£14.99
No.343 Colour 7ml	£20.99
No.344 Colour 14ml	£28.99
No.348 Photo 13ml	£23.99
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No.27 Colour	£11.99
No.28 Black	£11.99
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No.33 Colour	£11.99
No.34 Black	£11.99
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T026 Black	£39.99 16ml	£3.99 20ml, 3 for £10.99	Photo 810, 830 ,830u, 925, 935
T027 Colour	£29.99 46ml	£4.99 50ml, 3 for £13.99	
T040 Black	£44.99 17ml	£3.99 20ml, 3 for £10.99	C82, CX3200
T041 Colour	£39.99 37ml	£4.99 46ml, 3 for £13.99	
T050 Black	£32.99 15ml	£2.99 16ml, 3 for £7.99	440, 640, 660 Photo 700, 1200
T051 Black	£36.99 24ml	£2.99 26ml, 3 for £7.99	740, 760, 800, 850, 860, 1160
T052 Colour	£36.99 35ml	£3.99 39ml, 3 for £10.99	440, 640, 660, 740, 760, 1160
T053 Colour	£26.99 43ml	£3.99 46ml, 3 for £10.99	Photo 700, 750
T0441-4 Set of 4	£44.99	£14.99, 3 sets for £42.99	C64, C66, C84, C86,
T0441 Black	£19.99 13ml	£4.99 13ml, 3 for £13.99	CX3600/3650, CX6400, 6600
T0452-4 each	£9.99 8ml	£3.99 13ml, 3 for £10.99	
T0481-6 Set of 6	£69.99	£19.99, 3 sets for £57.99	R200, R220, R300, R320, R340
T0481-6 each	£15.99 13ml	£3.99 13ml, 3 for £10.99	RX500, RX600, RX620, RX640
T0540-9 Set of 8	£109.99	£35.99, 3 sets for £99.99	Photo R800, R1800
T0540 Gloss	£8.99 13ml	£3.99 21ml, 3 for £13.99	
T0541-9 each	£14.99 13ml	£4.99 21ml, 3 for £13.99	
T0551-4 Set of 4	£34.99	£14.99, 3 sets for £42.99	Photo R240, R245
T0551 Black	£8.99 8ml	£4.99 8ml, 3 for £10.99	RX420, RX425, RX520, RX525
T0552-4 each	£8.99 8ml	£3.99 8ml, 3 for £10.99	
T0591-9 Set of 8	£99.99	Check Website.	Photo R2400
T0591-9 each	£12.99 13ml	Check Website.	
T0611-4 Set of 4	£34.99	£14.99, 3 sets for £42.99	D68, D88
T0611 Black	£8.99 8ml	£4.99 8ml, 3 for £13.99	DX3800/3850, DX4200/4250
T0612-4 each	£8.99 8ml	£3.99 8ml, 3 for £10.99	DX4800/4850
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T0711 Black	£8.99 7.4ml	£4.99 7.4ml, 3 for £13.99	SX400/405/415/515, D78/92/120
T0711-4 each	£8.99 5.5ml	£3.99 7.4ml, 3 for £10.99	DX4000/4400/5000/6000/7400/8400
T0791-6 Set of 6	£74.99	Check Website.	Photo 1400
T0791-6 each	£12.99 10ml	Check Website.	
T0801-6 Set of 6	£51.99	£19.99, 3 sets for £57.99	P50, R265/285/360, RX560/585
T0801-6 each	£8.99 7.4ml	£3.99 7.4ml, 3 for £10.99	685/850, PX700/710/800/810
T0870-9 Set of 8	£74.99	Check Website.	Photo R1900
T0870 Gloss	£7.99 11.4ml	Check Website.	
T0871-9 each	£9.99 11.4ml	Check Website.	
T0961-9 Set of 8	£74.99	Check Website.	Photo R2880
T0961-9 each	£9.99 11.4ml	Check Website.	
T1281-4 Set of 4	£29.99	£14.99	S22, SX125, SX130, SX235W,
T1281 Black	£7.99 5.9ml	£4.99 5.9ml	SX420W/425W/435W/445W,
T1282-4 each	£7.99 3.5ml	£3.99 3.5ml	BX305F
T1291-4 Set of 4	£42.99	£16.99	SX235W/420W/425W/435W/445W,
T1291 Black	£10.99 11ml	£5.49 11ml	SX525WD/535WD/620FW, B42WD,
T1292-4 each	£10.99 7ml	£4.49 7ml	BX305F/320FW/525WD/625FWD
T1571-9 each	£20.99 25ml	Check Website.	R3000
T1591-9 each	£14.99 17ml	Check Website.	R2000
T5801-9 each	£41.99 80ml	Check Website.	Pro 3800, 3880
No.16 Set of 4	£24.99	£14.99	Workforce WF-2010W, 2510WF,
No.16 Black	£6.99 5.4ml	£4.99 5.4ml	2520INF, 2530WF, 2540WF
No.16 C/M/Y, each	£5.99 3.1ml	£3.99 3.1ml	
No.18 Set of 4	£22.99	£14.99	Expression Home XP30,
No.18 Black	£6.99 5.2ml	£4.99 5.2ml	XP102, 202, 205
No.18 C/M/Y, each	£5.99 3.3ml	£3.99 3.3ml	XP302, 305, 402, 405
No.24 Set of 6	£44.99	No.24XL Set of 6 £69.99	Expression Photo XP750, 850
No.24 B/L/C/LM, ea	£7.99 5.1ml	No.24XL B/L/C/LM, ea £11.99 9.8ml	
No.24 C/M/Y, each	£7.99 4.8ml	No.24XL C/M/Y, each £11.99 8.7ml	
No.26 Set of 4	£30.99	No.26XL Set of 4 £54.99	Expression Premium XP600, 605, XP700, 800
No.26 Black	£8.99 6.2ml	No.26XL Black £14.99 12.1ml	
No.26 Photo Black	£7.99 4.7ml	No.26XL Photo Black £13.99 8.7ml	
No.26 C/M/Y, each	£7.99 4.5ml	No.26XL C/M/Y, each £13.99 9.7ml	

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Explore

WINDOWS TIPS ▶ INTERNET ADVICE ▶ YOUR DISC SOFTWARE

Welcome



Whether you're stuck for inspiration or want to become a master of your Windows computer, our Explore section is the place to come. Each month we pack it with tutorials covering a range of subjects suitable for all levels of expertise.

This month, Nick explains how to research your family tree, Christian shows you how to get the best deal on your next holiday with Bing Travel, and Ed helps you back up the most valuable data on your PC. There's never been a better time to see how your PC can make your life easier than ever!

Graham Barlow
editor-in-chief
graham.barlow@futurenet.com

Full listing...

24 Research and record your family history

28 Set a picture password in Windows 8

32 Write your first novel with yWriter

36 Plan the perfect trip with Bing Travel

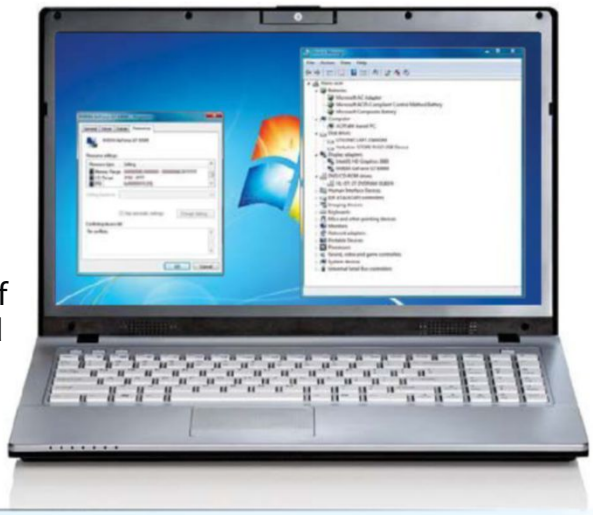
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54 Find new songs using Windows 8's Music app



Your guide Alan Dexter says...

"Mastering Device Manager is the best way of fixing hardware issues and making sure old drivers don't cause problems."

Turn to page 50 for more

Our promise to you...

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This issue's free disc is packed with full software, essential toolkits, apps and resources to help you get the most from your computer.

Look out for the badge (below) pointing to key files for the article you're reading.

On your disc

Install the free **Windows Essentials** suite from the Extras section.

Learn how to...

Record your family history



Your guide Nick Peers says...

"My Family Tree is a great tool for building and managing your family tree. Find out how."

At a glance...

SKILL LEVEL

- Anyone can do it
- Straightforward
- Tricky in parts

TIME TAKEN

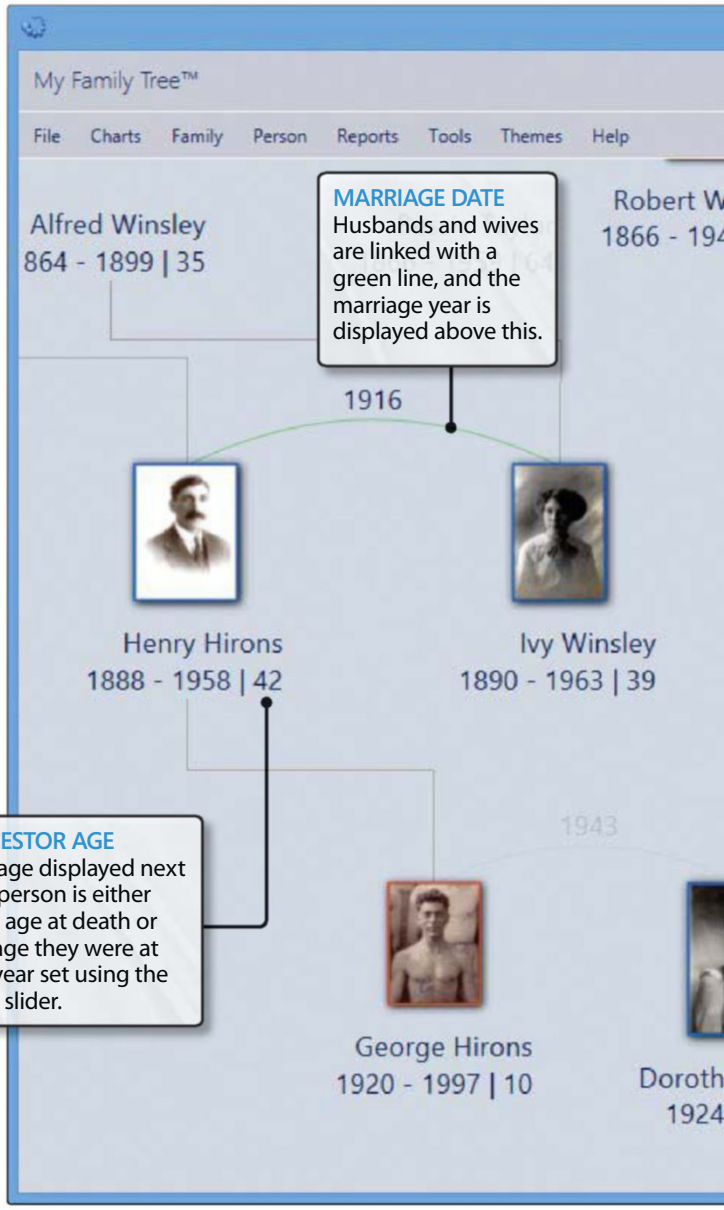
1 hour

SUITABLE FOR

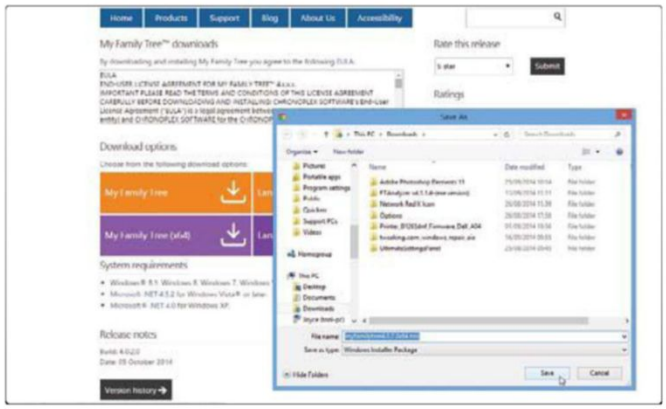
- Windows 8
- Windows 7
- Windows Vista
- Windows XP

History can be boring without context, and what better context could there be than to place your ancestors at the heart of it? Genealogy is an exciting way to learn about where you came from and reconnect with your family.

Family history software is plentiful, but most packages cost money. If you're dipping your toe into the genealogical waters, then My Family Tree is one of the best free tools you'll find for recording and managing your family's rich history. The program offers all the core tools you need, helping you build your tree, flesh out your ancestors' lives with events and attributes, attach old family photos and video, and even preserve stories handed down through the generations. Thanks to powerful reporting and analytical tools, you can take your research to the next level too. You can even customise its appearance with **themes**. Read on...



Step-by-step | Record your family history





1 Download, install, set up

Go to www.chronoplexsoftware.com/myfamilytree and click 'Get it free'. 32-bit users should click the orange 'Download' button and 64-bit users should choose the purple 'My Family Tree (x64') option. Once downloaded, double-click the setup file and follow the setup wizard to the end. Once complete, leave 'Launch My Family Tree' ticked and click 'Finish' to open the program.

2 Set up new tree

When the main menu appears, click 'Start a new family tree'. You'll be prompted to add your first family member – typically yourself. Enter your gender, then add your forename(s), surname, date of birth and birth place (use the format town, county, country) and click 'Add'. You'll see yourself appear in the centre of the main screen with your details in the right-hand pane.

NICK'S BEST TIP!
Visit http://maps.google.com, right-click the red marker and click 'What's here?' to get its latitude and longitude.

EDIT CONTROLS
The currently selected person is displayed in this pane. Use the various options to add more detail and media to their tree entry.

TIME SLIDER
The time slider lets you view your tree as it stood in a specific year, greying out events and people born after this date.

CHART CONTROLS
The spanner button lets you customise your tree's appearance and what's shown; the cog button lets you switch views.

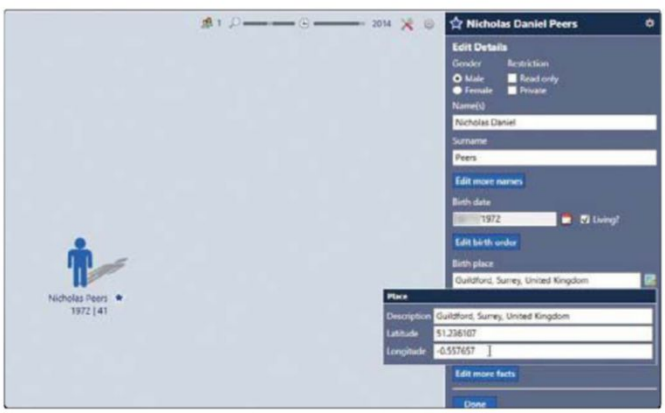
FAMILY VIEW
Use the search box to locate a person in your tree, then click on them to make them the tree's focal point.

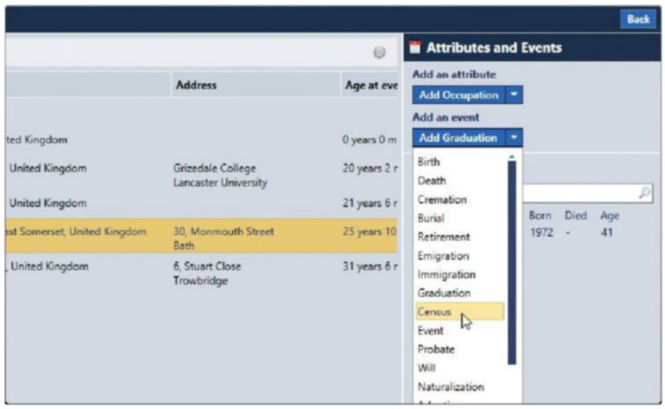
Jargon buster!

Attachments
Attachments allow you to link any file to an individual, and are typically scanned documents such as birth certificates.

Pedigree tree
A horizontal diagram that shows a selected individual on the left and a set number of generations of their direct ancestors on the right.

Theme
My Family Tree supports the use of different themes, which you can use to change its appearance for either cosmetic or accessibility purposes.





3 Edit personal details

After saving your file for the first time (select 'File > Save', then choose a folder and name for your file), click the 'Details' button underneath your avatar to record more information about yourself. Start by clicking the little map icon next to your birthplace – you can record the exact Latitude and Longitude of your birthplace if you wish (see my best tip for details).

4 Add more facts

Click 'Edit more facts' to add extra attributes (such as education or nationality) and events (such as christening, census or emigration) by clicking the appropriate button. Then click the event on the left to fill in the details, such as details, date and place. Use the Address field to record an exact street address and contact details. Add as many facts as you wish to include.



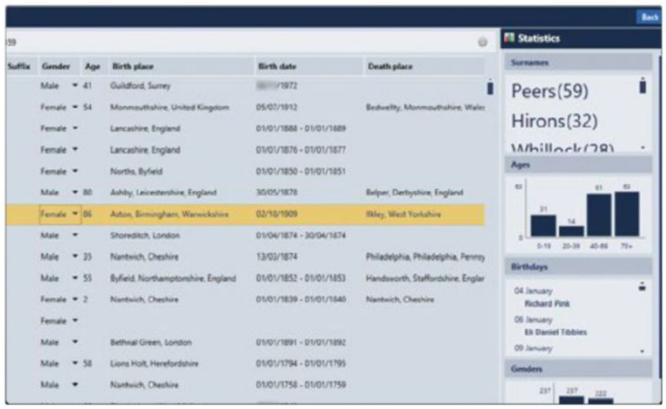
5 Attach photos

Click 'Back', then click 'Photos and story' to upload photos of yourself, or 'Attachments' to link other files. Either drag them into the space provided, or click 'Add > Scan new image' to scan them in. Add as many as you like, then click one to add information such as date, title and caption. Select 'Edit' to view the photo's properties and editor toolbar to make further changes.



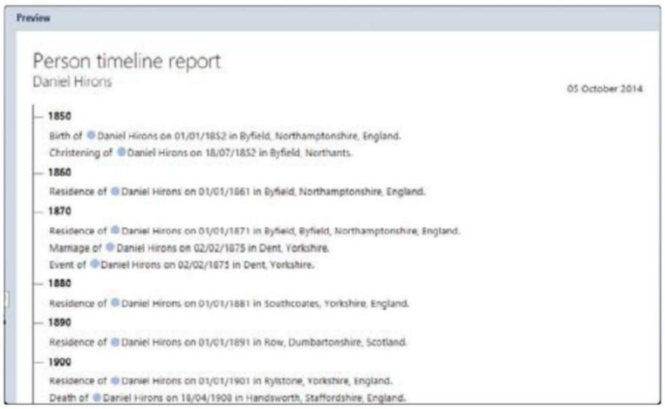
6 Build your tree

Click 'Back', then click the arrow beside 'Create relationship' to choose the next person in your tree. This is typically someone related to you directly, but you can select 'Unrelated'. Fill in their details and add photos as before. If they're present in a photo you've already uploaded (say a wedding photo), you can edit the photo and use the 'File tags' field to link the photo to them.



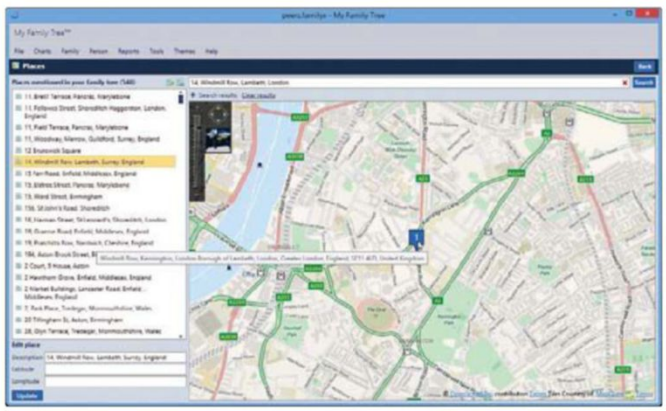
7 Family statistics

Once your tree is well established, packed with lots of information and photos, My Family Tree provides a number of useful tools for analysing and viewing it all. Start by clicking the 'Family data' button in the right-hand pane. You'll be shown a list of all individuals on the left, and some handy stats and graphs on the right. Select 'Family > Statistics' for even more useful stats.



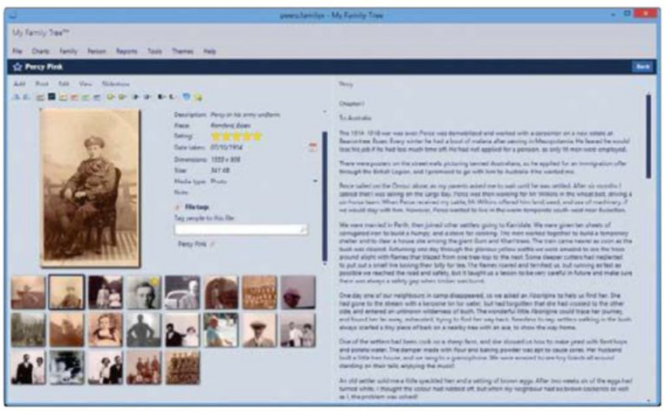
8 Generate reports

My Family Tree also provides a large collection of reports – click the 'Reports' menu to access them. Reports can be on a family, individual or topic, such as birthdays or places. Click the 'Preview' button to see what it looks like, then click 'Customise' to refine it further by choosing which options to include or leave out. Click 'Save' to save it as a web page, or 'Print' to print it out.



9 Plot your ancestors on a map

Open the Family menu for more analytical options – we particularly like the mapping tools found under 'Places'. Select a place in the left-hand pane, then click the 'Search' button to try and locate it on the map. If no results are found, try refining your search terms or Googling the street address to see if there are any records about what happened to the street.



10 And there's more

With the basics covered, you can tap into more useful features: record free-form narratives about individuals in the 'Photos and Story' section, or click 'Genetics' to record information including eye and hair colour. It's also possible to switch the main view to a pedigree tree; click 'Settings' and choose 'Ancestors tree' to do so. Whatever your needs, My Family Tree has it covered. ■



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Learn how to...

Set a Picture Password

IAN'S BEST TIP
Take a picture especially to use as your password. That way you can be sure your gestures will fit, and you can choose one that will confuse potential snoopers.



Your guide Ian Evenden says...

"You don't have to remember a complex password to log in to Windows. You can draw a series of gestures on a picture instead, even without a touchscreen."

At a glance...

SKILL LEVEL
- Anyone can do it
- ▶ Straightforward
- Tricky in parts

TIME TAKEN
- ▶ 10 minutes

SUITABLE FOR
- Windows 8
- Windows 7
- Windows Vista
- Windows XP

Have trouble remembering whether your high-security password goes 39*th@1 or 39*th@l? Windows 8 offers a couple of ways to log in to your account securely, and one of them involves pictures. Choosing to use a picture password means you'll be asked to sketch out a series of taps, lines or circles on a previously chosen picture, using either your mouse or gestures on a touchscreen.

It's a security measure that has been criticised for being easy to guess – when faced with a picture containing three obvious circles, for example, the first thing an intruder is going to do is to try drawing a swirl over all of them. But with a bit of thought, the correct combination can be obscure enough to deter unauthorised entry to your system.

Windows uses the Pictures folder to source images, so make sure it's well stocked before you begin.

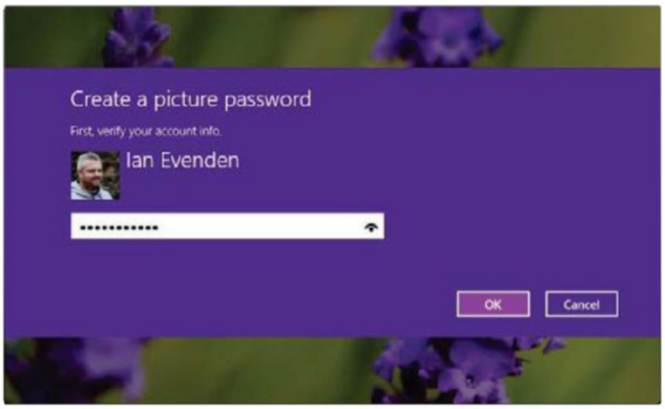


Step-by-step | Log on with a picture



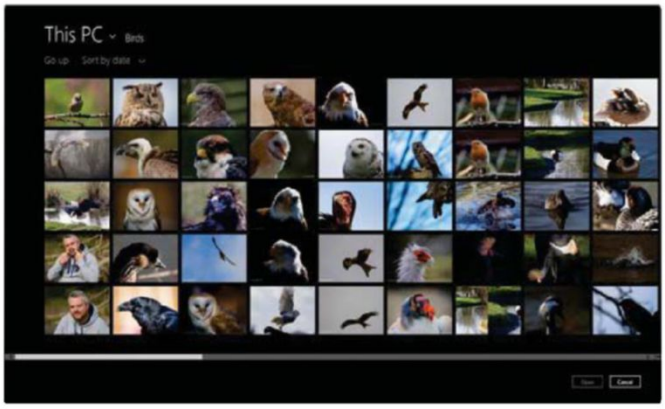
1 Open Settings

To use a Picture Password, you need to find User Accounts Settings. This can be done in a number of ways. You can bring up the Charms bar by moving your mouse to the right-hand edge of the screen and pushing it up, then clicking 'Settings > Change PC settings'. Alternatively, you can bring up the Start Screen and type **users**, or open the Control Panel and select 'User accounts'.



2 Type your password

However you get there, once you're in User Account Settings select 'Create a picture password' under Sign-in Options. You'll need permission to change your account password, so you may have to talk nicely to whoever holds the Administrator account. Windows will also ask for your account password before it lets you choose a picture. Type this in and press [Enter].



3 Choose a picture

Hit 'Choose picture' and the contents of your Pictures folder should appear. You can use the 'Go up' button to leave this folder and choose an image from anywhere on your PC. The choice of picture is important: an image with three parallel lines, for example, could be easily guessed unless you deliberately set out to confound potential PC intruders. We'll use a picture of a bird.



4 Decide on gestures

The majestic bald eagle (this one's name is Orion) offers a variety of potential gestures. We could draw a line along his beak, a circle around his eye, tap his nostril or go abstract and draw a series of lines and circles on the background – anyone trying to break in to the PC is unlikely to guess that, but there's more chance we'll forget where we put them when we need to log in.



5 Input gestures – twice

Click or tap on the picture to register your gestures. A tap, which is a single point, can go anywhere. Lines can be dragged in any direction for any length, and circles can go in either direction. You've got three gestures to use, you so could draw a cross across the image with a tap or circle in the centre, for example. You'll be asked to confirm the gestures before they're finalised.



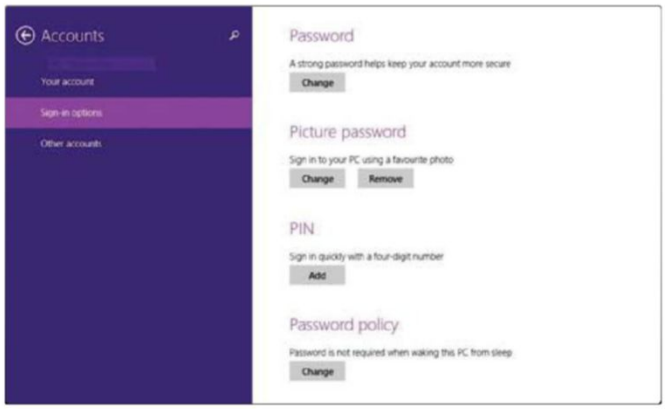
6 Sign out

If you enter the gestures the same way again, Windows will congratulate you and you'll see a 'Finish' button. Click it, and you'll be returned to the User Settings screen. Nothing will change until you next log in, so hit the [Windows] key to bring up the Start screen, click your account name at the top right and select 'Sign out'. You'll soon be presented with the Windows logon screen.



7 Sign in

Click or tap your account name to begin the signing in process as you normally would. The picture you chose in Step 3 will appear, and you'll be ready to input your gestures. It's a bit easier to do with a touchscreen device than a mouse, but there's not much in it, and with a bit of practice you'll be logged in within seconds. It's certainly faster than typing a complex password.



8 Remove the picture

Get the picture password wrong five times in a row and you'll be asked for your alphanumeric password, so don't forget it. If you ever want to disable the Picture Password and go back to the old-fashioned alternative, go to 'User accounts > Sign-in options', and click the 'Remove' button under Picture Password. The next time you log in, you'll be asked to type your password. ■

Windows Help & Advice

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Learn how to...

Write your first novel



Your guide Nick Peers says...

"Plan your perfect story and then write it with the help of the free yWriter word processor."

At a glance...

SKILL LEVEL

Anyone can do it
▶ Straightforward
Tricky in parts

TIME TAKEN

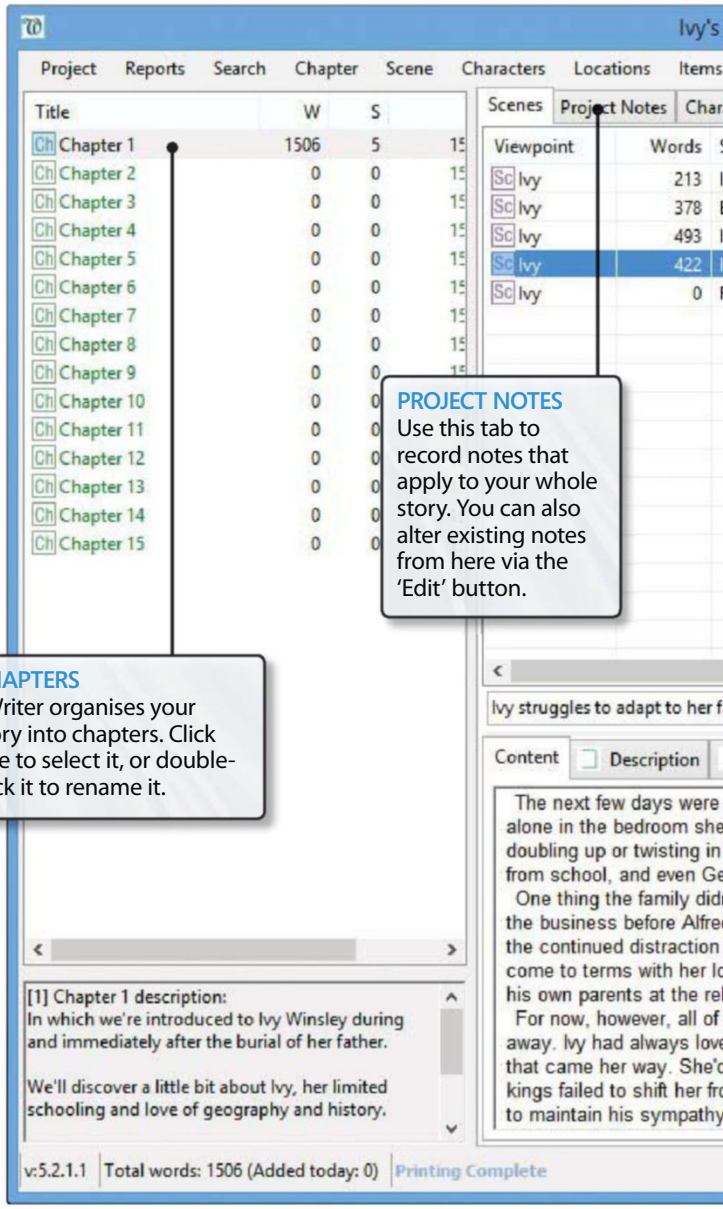
▶ 25 minutes

SUITABLE FOR

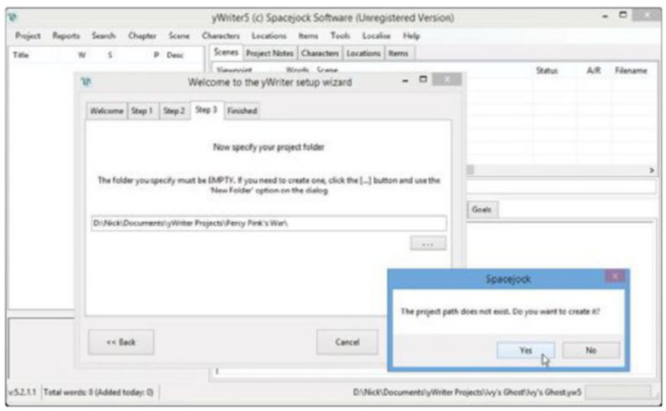
Windows 8
Windows 7
Windows Vista
Windows XP

When there's a story in your head that you're itching to commit to paper, you need yWriter. This is more than just a simple word processor; it's a fully featured project management tool aimed at budding novelists. It provides everything you need to plot, structure and write your tale, including tools for managing your story's characters, locations and objects, plus a handy set of note-taking features.

yWriter divides your story into chapters, which are split into scenes. This lets you break each chapter down into manageable chunks that can then be rearranged at any time. You're then provided with everything you need to write your story, complete with easy access to all that planning material to keep things consistent. All that's left is for you to unleash your inner author. Read on to find out how…

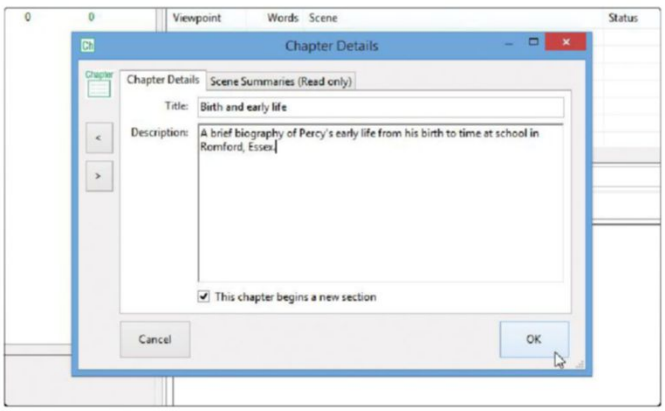


Step-by-step | Plan, write and publish your novel



1 Set up your project

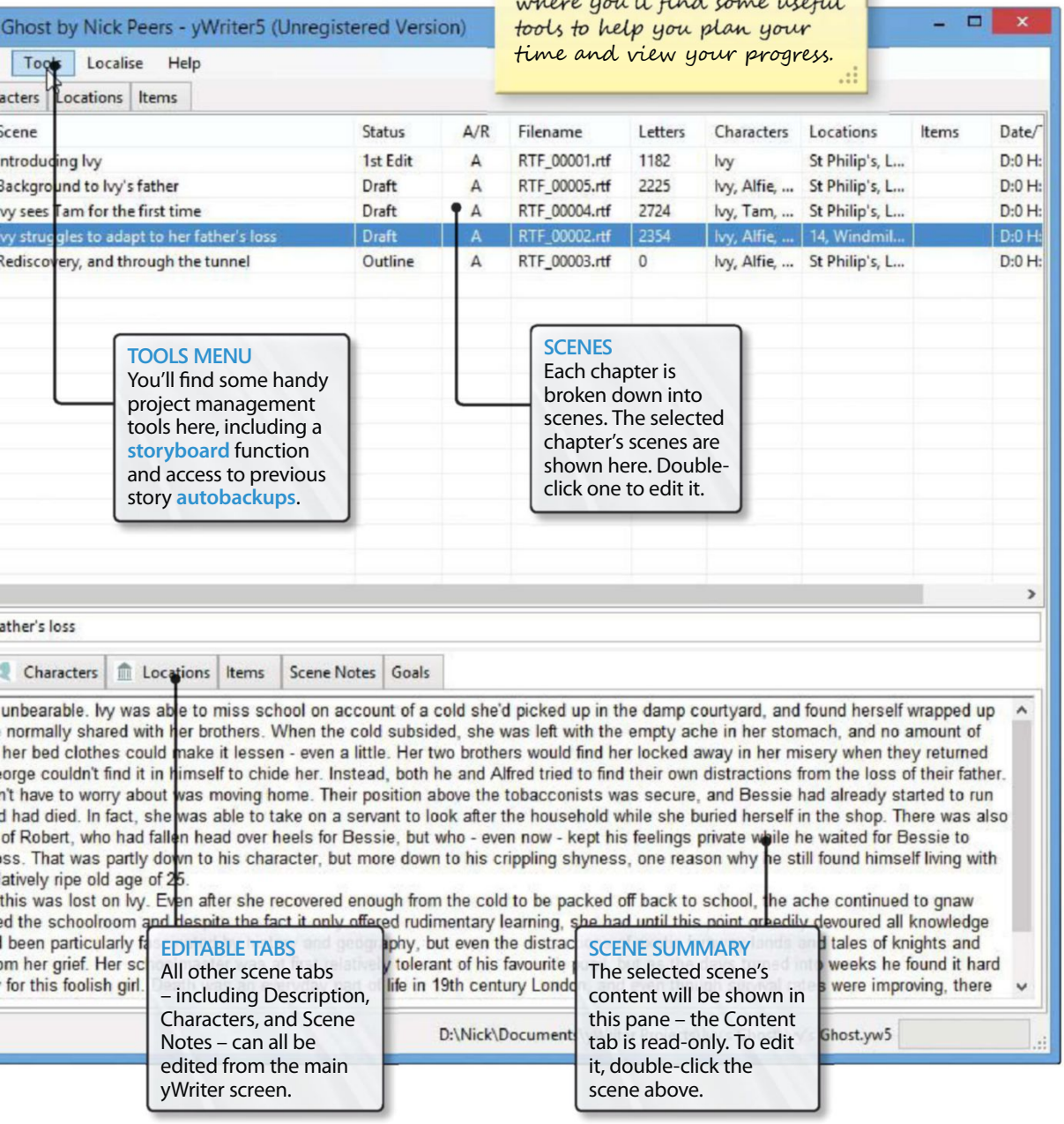
Install yWriter from your free disc, then launch the program. Open the Project menu and choose 'New Project Wizard'. Click 'Next', then enter your project's title. Click 'Next' and type your own name, then click 'Next' again. Now click the '…' button to pick a suitable folder to save your project to. Once done, click 'Next' followed by 'Yes' to create the folder. Finally, click 'Finish'.



2 Create first chapter

Open the Chapter menu and choose 'Create new chapter'. Change the title from Chapter 1 if required, then provide a brief description of what happens in the chapter. Ignore the Scene Summaries tab – this is read-only and filled automatically when you set up each scene. If your book is going to be split into sections, tick 'This chapter begins a new section' and click 'OK'.

NICK'S BEST TIP!
Check the Reports menu, where you'll find some useful tools to help you plan your time and view your progress.



TOOLS MENU
You'll find some handy project management tools here, including a storyboard function and access to previous story autobackups.

SCENES
Each chapter is broken down into scenes. The selected chapter's scenes are shown here. Double-click one to edit it.

EDITABLE TABS
All other scene tabs – including Description, Characters, and Scene Notes – can all be edited from the main yWriter screen.

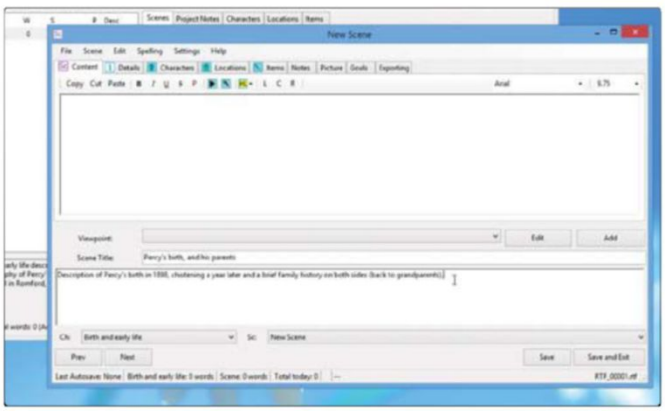
SCENE SUMMARY
The selected scene's content will be shown in this pane – the Content tab is read-only. To edit it, double-click the scene above.

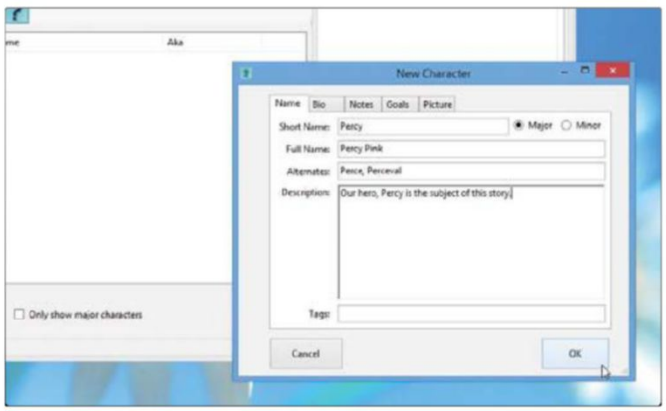
Jargon buster!

Autobackup
yWriter makes backups of your main project files once a day, but also backs up a scene each time it's opened for editing. Access these via 'Tools > Backups'.

Scene
The basic building blocks of your story, scenes are short passages of text that combine into chapters to form your story's narrative.

Storyboard
A graphical horizontal timeline view of your novel, organised by chapter, showing each character and the scenes in which they appear.



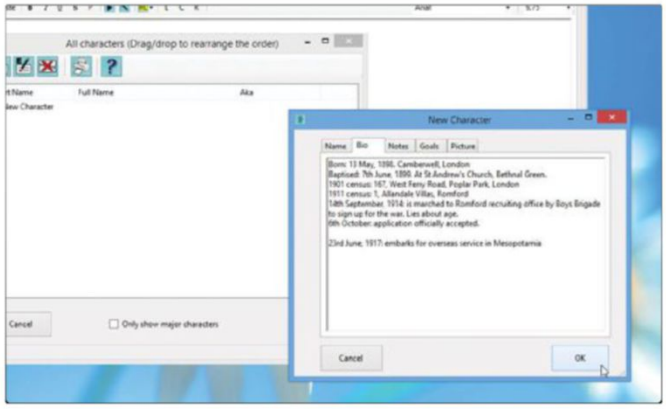


3 Set the first scene

Each chapter is broken down into individual scenes, which split your story into manageable bite-sized pieces that can easily be moved around. Open the Scene menu and choose 'Create New Scene' to open the main Scene editing window. First, choose a suitably descriptive title to help you identify the scene, then add a more detailed description beneath it – typically a brief synopsis.

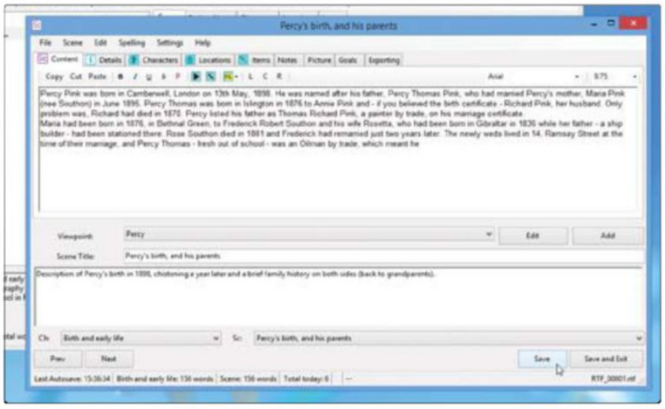
4 Add characters

You'll see a Viewpoint menu above the scene title – this allows you to choose the scene's main protagonist. First, you need to create one or more characters. Click the 'Add' button to the right followed by 'Add new' when the new window appears. Start by giving the character a short name and indicating whether they're minor or major, then fill in the rest of the Name tab.



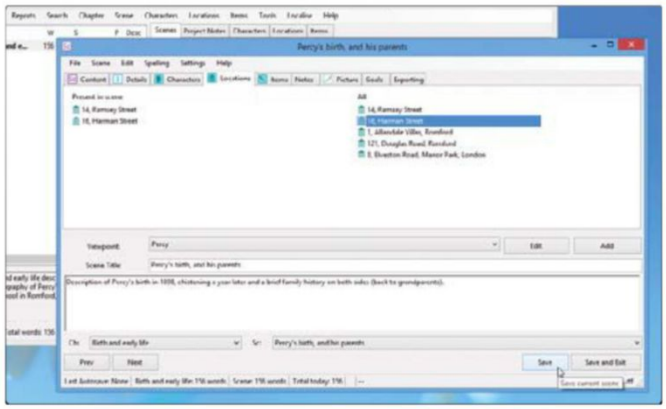
5 Complete character setup

If applicable, use the Bio tab to provide your character with a background. The Notes tab lets you record miscellaneous information about them, while the Goals tab lets you specify their motivation. The Picture tab lets you attach an image to the character – not really required unless you've based them on a real person and want a visual cue to help you describe them.



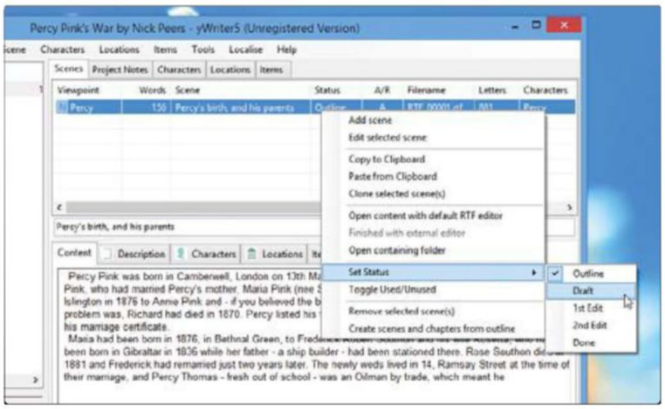
6 Start writing

You can now start typing the scene into the Content tab's text window. You're supplied with some basic formatting tools, including a useful highlighter. Click the 'Save' button regularly to update your work. When you're ready to move on to the next scene in your story, simply select 'Scene > Add Scene (after current)'. You don't need to finish your current scene first.



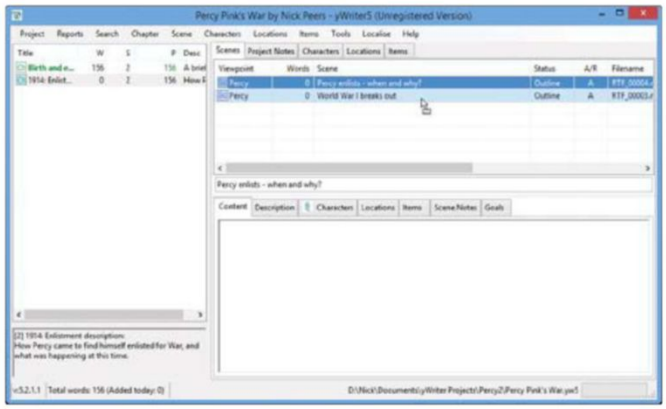
7 Advanced scene tools

Check out the other tabs: Details records information like how long the scene is, or whether it's a major plot or subplot. The Locations and Items tabs allow you to attach key places and objects to the scene (right-click under 'Present in Scene' and choose 'New') to help you keep track of what's linked where. There are also tabs for scene-specific notes, photos and goals.



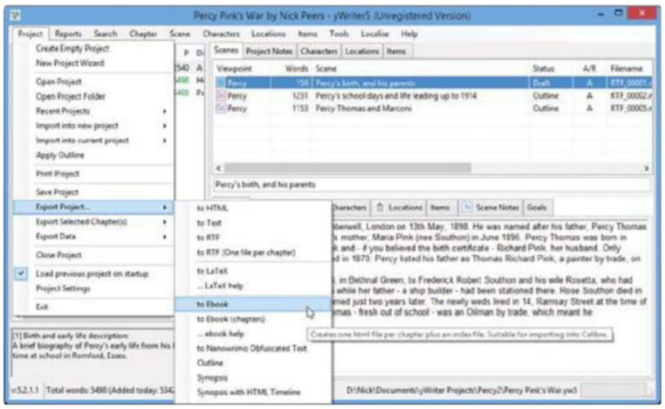
8 Review and update

Click 'Save and Exit' to return to the main screen where you'll see a summary of the work you've done so far. Select a chapter from the left-hand column and all its scenes will appear in the right-hand pane. You'll notice your scenes have a status. This is set to Outline by default, but you can change this by right-clicking the scene and choosing 'Draft', 'Edit 1', 'Edit 2' or 'Done'.



9 Rearrange your story

One of yWriter's strengths is the way it allows you to reorder your story – simply drag and drop scenes to move them around, or drag a scene to another chapter to move it to that chapter. Want to split a lengthy scene in two? Easy: simply type a # at the point you wish to break the scene in the Scene Editing window, then choose 'Scene > Split scene on '#'' to break it up.



10 Keep writing – and publish!

Now you have all the tools in place to help you, there's no excuse not to embark on the novel, memoir or travelogue that's been rattling around in the back of your head. yWriter supports multiple projects too, so you can work on more than one story at once. Once it's complete, choose 'Project > Export Project' to save it in your preferred format, including text, ebook and HTML. ■

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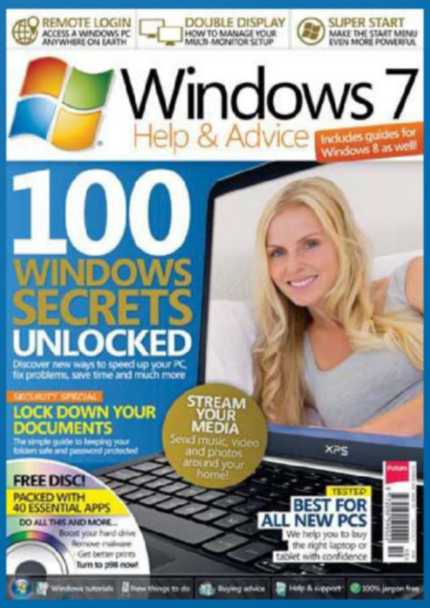
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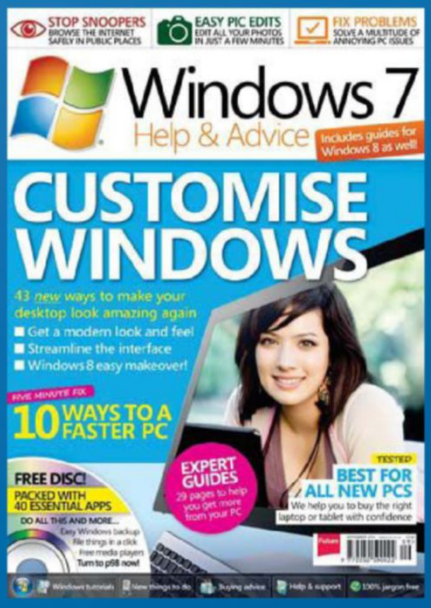
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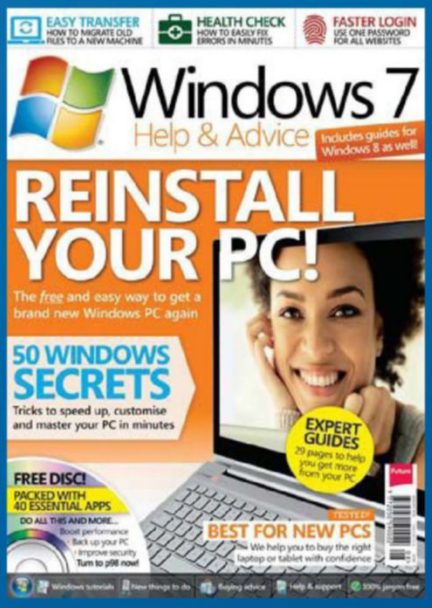
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Learn how to...

Plan the perfect trip away with Bing Travel



Your guide Christian Hall says...

"Planning a holiday online should be simple, but that's not always the case when you have to hunt around for the best deals. Windows 8's own Travel app is here to help."

At a glance...

SKILL LEVEL

- Anyone can do it
- Straightforward
- Tricky in parts

TIME TAKEN

20 minutes

SUITABLE FOR

- Windows 8
- Windows 7
- Windows Vista
- Windows XP

Windows 8's Travel app (incorporating Bing Travel's search) enables you explore over 2,000 destinations through beautiful photos and 360-degree Bing Panoramas. Travel guides, booking tools, real time currency conversion and weather provide everything you need to turn travel inspiration into your next great trip.

You can use it to find the perfect destination for your holiday, or look up information if you know where you want to go. Naturally, you can also get details on airports, hotels and restaurants, and even use it to book your air travel and make your hotel reservations. It's been designed as a Modern app for Windows 8, and you'll love how easy it is to browse through holiday details. It's much less cluttered than most travel agents' sites! Here's a quick look at how to use Windows 8's Travel app to map out your next trip.

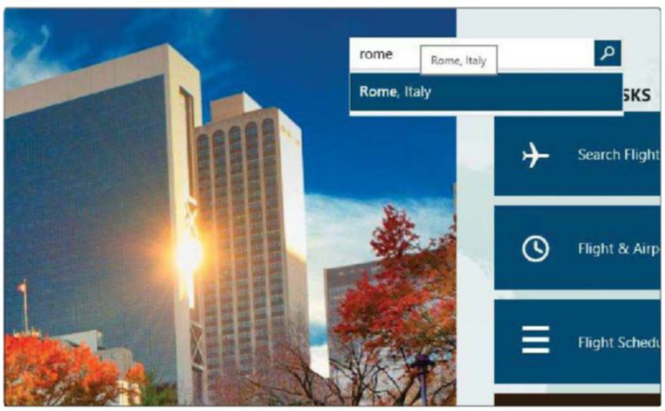


Step-by-step | Plan your trip with Windows 8



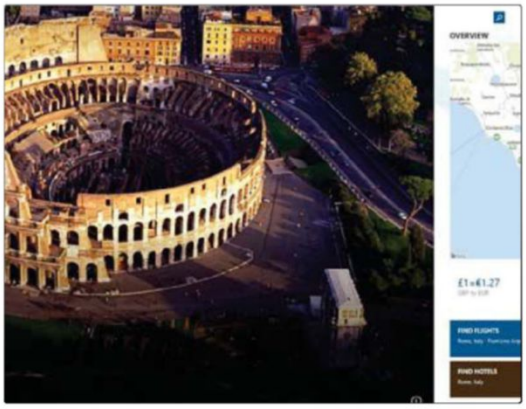
1 Fire up the tile

From the Start screen in Windows 8, click or tap on the tile for Travel (which you can identify by its attractive destination picture). The Travel app will open to reveal the current featured destination as selected by MSN. Scroll to the right to discover more destinations, see panoramic photos of different locations and read various recommended travel articles.



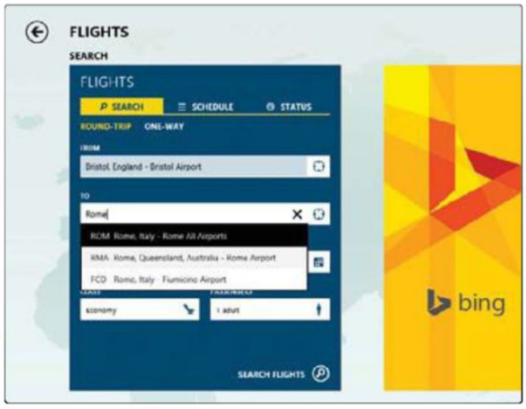
2 Browse destinations

You can browse through the different featured destinations or search for a specific one if you've got something in mind. Here we're planning a trip to Rome. In the search field in the top right of the app window, type **Rome**. Underneath the search field, 'Rome, Italy' appears as the top suggested destination. This is what we want, so click on that destination result.



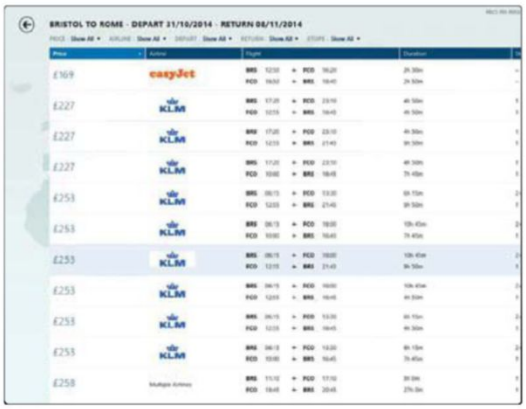
3 Destination details

The app displays details about Rome, including 360-degree panoramas. Scroll to the right to see the city introduction, a map, currency information, weather and a link to book a flight or hotel. Scroll to the far right to explore nearby destinations that may be of interest.



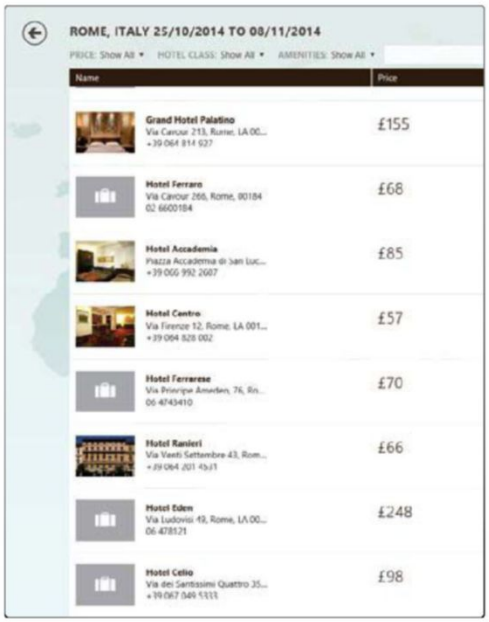
4 Find flights

Click 'Find Flights', then click the 'From' field. The app asks if you want to turn on location services and allow Travel to use your IP address. In the 'From' field, click the round icon to let the app consider all airports in your vicinity, or delete the suggestion and type the name or code for your closest airport.



5 Book a flight

Enter your departure and return details, then click 'Search flights'. You'll see all the flights matching your dates, along with each one's ticket price, airline, departure and arrival times, duration and so on. Click on a specific flight for more details. Click 'Book' if you wish to confirm the flight.



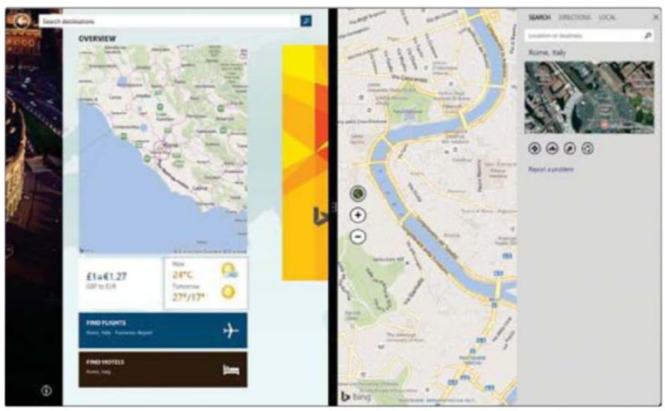
6 Find a hotel

Scroll to the right until you see the Hotels section (or click 'Find hotels' under the map on the left). Click 'Find hotels' and enter the check-in and check-out dates, the number of rooms and the number of guests. Click on 'Search hotels' and you'll see all the suggested hotels matching your dates, along with price, rating and amenities. Click on a hotel to view more details.



7 Book a hotel

To make a hotel reservation, click on the 'Book from' button. You'll then be shown a list of websites where you can reserve your chosen room. Click one and, as before, a browser window will open showing the site of the hotel or agent you need. Depending on the site, you might be able to adjust your booking here and perhaps see offers that weren't available in the app.



8 Have a great trip!

Now you're all booked up and ready to go it's time to get packing! Check out the 360-degree panoramas of your destination by scrolling along until you see 'Panoramas'. Just click the left mouse button and move it around to get an amazing view. You can also check on the weather from the app. You'll find the forecast next to the exchange rate, under the map. ■

Jargon buster!

Bing
Microsoft's search engine and search services, which are all connected to each other.

Bing Panorama
An interactive 360-degree view of a location, made up from a series of real photographs.

Tile
One of the large icons on Windows 8's Start screen.

Learn how to...

Connect to your PC using an iPad



Your guide Graham Barlow says...

"If you have an iPad, you can use it to access your desktop PC anywhere thanks to Microsoft Remote Desktop."



At a glance...

SKILL LEVEL

Anyone can do it
Straightforward
▶ Tricky in parts

TIME TAKEN

▶ 20 minutes

SUITABLE FOR

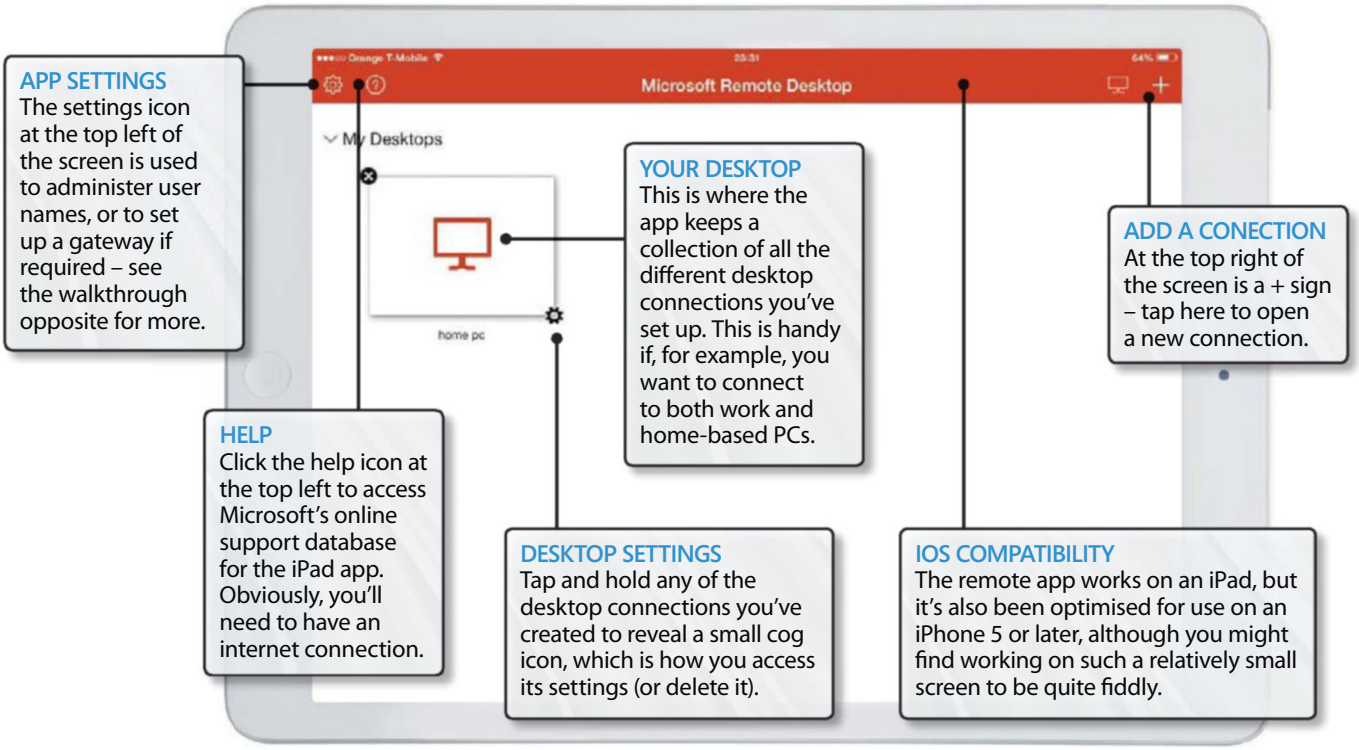
Windows 8
Windows 7
Windows Vista
Windows XP

Using an iPad, it's possible to access your Windows PC thanks to a free app called Microsoft Remote Desktop. It's like having a version of your PC running on your iPad, so you can get to all your files with ease, and even run programs.

For the app to work, you need to tweak a few settings in your version of Windows and have your iPad and Windows PC on the same wireless network. The app works with Windows 7 and Windows 8/8.1, but we've used Windows 7 here since it's still the most popular version and the one you're most likely running.

Once you've tweaked a few of your system settings (which we'll show you how to do here) you're ready to use the app. You need to identify the computer you're using, and ensure you have the username and password for your login handy. If you have an Administrator account then you will already have access, but if you'd like to give individual users of your PC access, you can do this as well.

Your guide | Microsoft Remote Desktop



APP SETTINGS
The settings icon at the top left of the screen is used to administer user names, or to set up a gateway if required – see the walkthrough opposite for more.

HELP
Click the help icon at the top left to access Microsoft's online support database for the iPad app. Obviously, you'll need to have an internet connection.

YOUR DESKTOP
This is where the app keeps a collection of all the different desktop connections you've set up. This is handy if, for example, you want to connect to both work and home-based PCs.

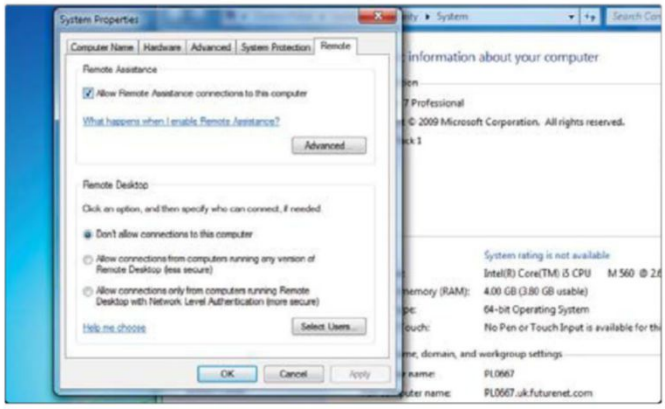
DESKTOP SETTINGS
Tap and hold any of the desktop connections you've created to reveal a small cog icon, which is how you access its settings (or delete it).

ADD A CONECTION
At the top right of the screen is a + sign – tap here to open a new connection.

IOS COMPATIBILITY
The remote app works on an iPad, but it's also been optimised for use on an iPhone 5 or later, although you might find working on such a relatively small screen to be quite fiddly.

Step-by-step | Connect to your PC from your iPad



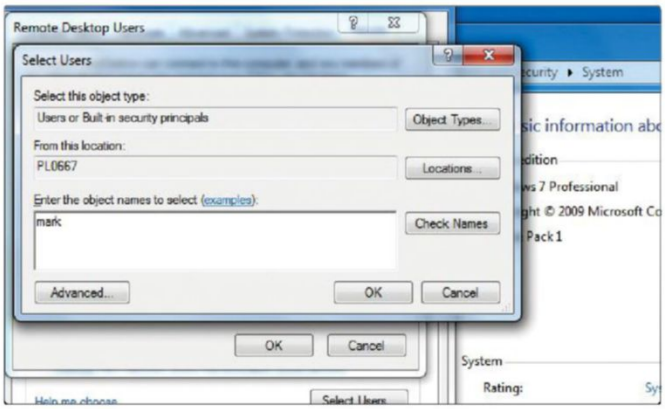


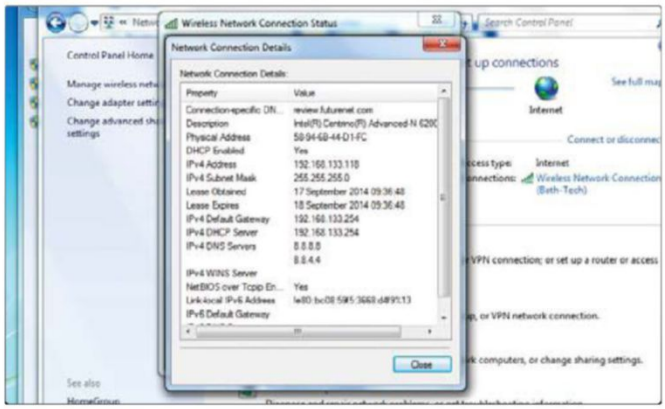
1 Download and install

Download the app from the App Store and open it on your iPad. Now it's time to head to your Windows PC. You will need an Administrator account, or have administrative privileges, to make the necessary changes; if you're the only user on your PC, this is likely to be the case by default. See http://bit.ly/ZrqcaS for more on this, and if necessary get the password for an admin account.

2 Tweak your settings

The first step is to allow remote connections on your PC. The instructions for Windows 8 vary slightly (http://bit.ly/1jGNCMX). Click 'Start', right-click 'Computer' and select 'Properties > Remote settings'. Make sure the box 'Allow remote assistance connections to this computer' is ticked and select the bottom option ('Allow connections only…') in the Remote Desktop section.



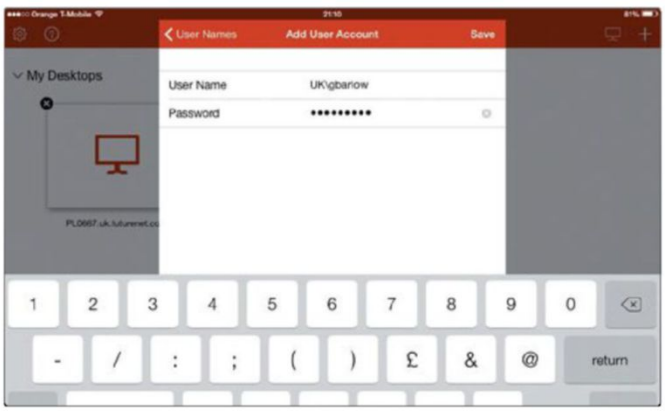


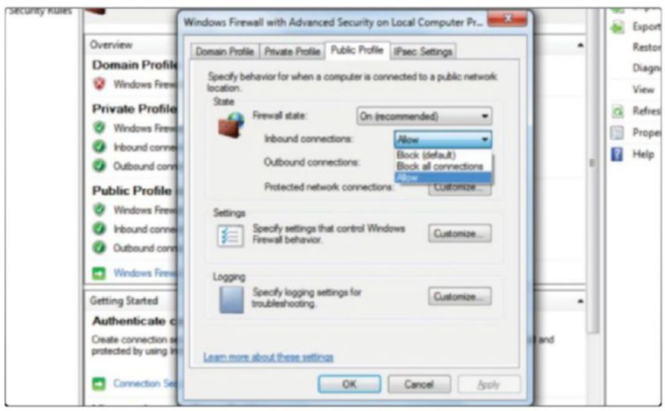
3 Set up users

If you want to log in as the system administrator using your iPad, there's no reason to bother selecting which users have access. However, if you want other users of your PC to be able to log in as themselves, you can set this up now. Click 'Select users' then enter the names of the users in the box provided, and click on 'Check names' to make sure they are correct. Finally, click 'OK'.

4 Find your IP address

There's one more thing you need to know: your IP address. Click 'Start > Control Panel > Network and Internet > Network and Sharing Centre'. You'll see your current Wi-Fi connection listed in the active networks section. Click it, then click 'Details' in the box that pops up. Your IP address will be listed opposite 'IPv4 Address' – it will be something like 192.168.133.118. Write it down.





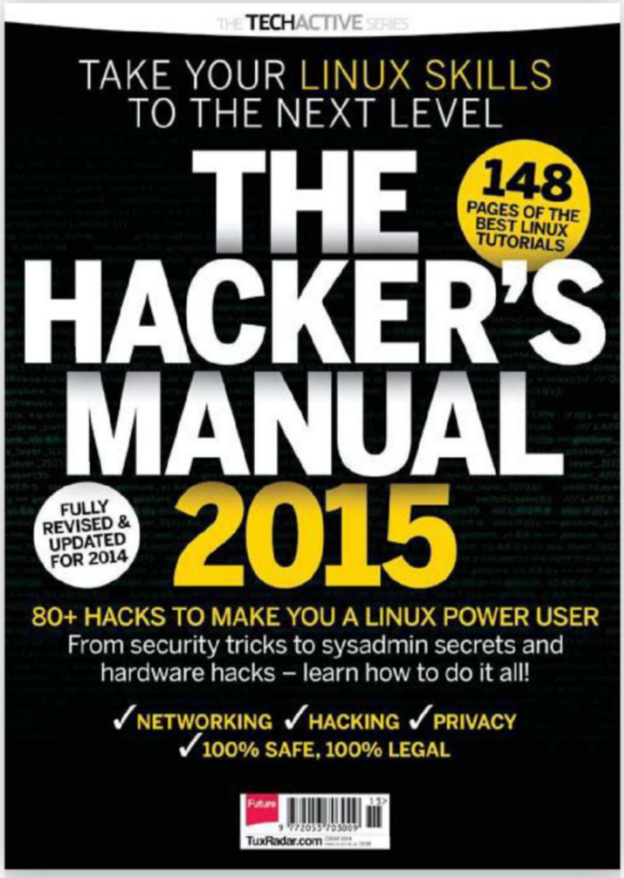
5 Time to connect

On your iPad, fire up the Microsoft Remote Connection app, and tap the + icon at the top right. Tap 'Add PC or server', and in the section PC Name, type in your IP address. Tap 'Username > Add user account' and type in your username and password. Head back to the home screen and tap the new desktop connection you've created. If all's well, you can now control your PC remotely!

6 Troubleshooting

If you're having difficulty, it could be due to Windows Firewall actively blocking remote connections. You'll need to either turn your firewall off for now (remember to turn it back on after the session), or enable incoming connections in all profiles. Click 'Start', then type **Windows Firewall**. There are three profile settings; the quick fix is to make sure it is turned off in all three. ■

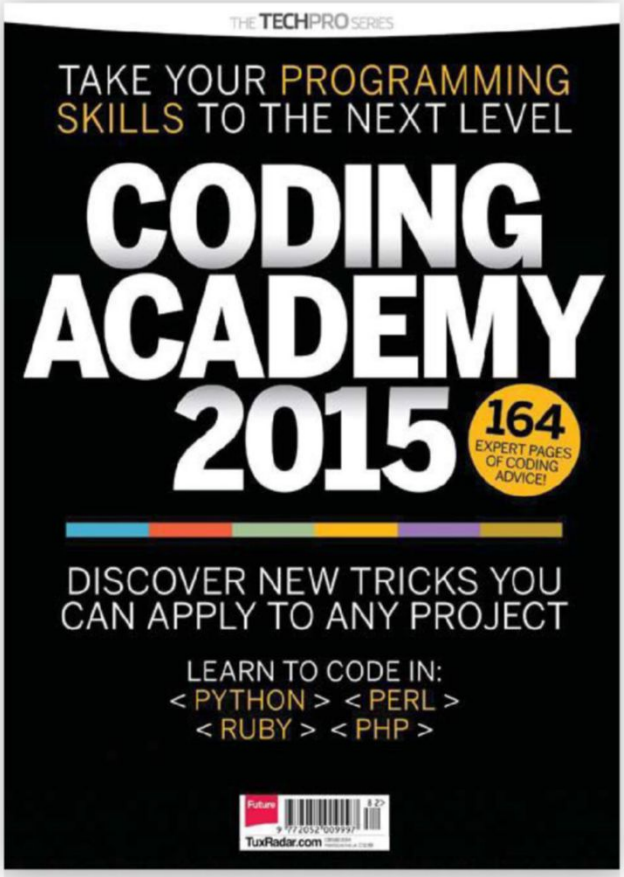
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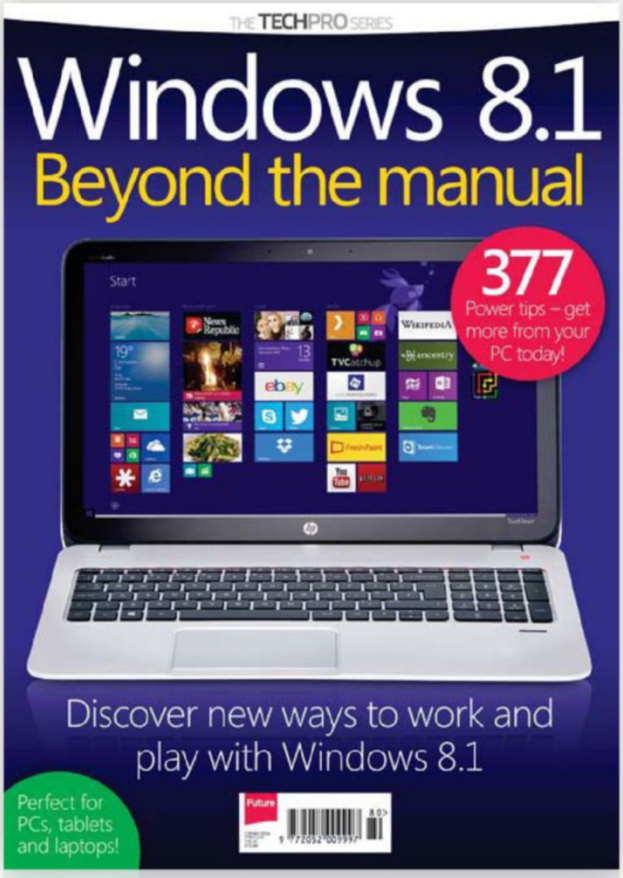
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Learn how to...

Back up with File History



Your guide Ed Ricketts says...

"Windows 8 makes it incredibly easy to keep a running backup of your most precious data."

At a glance...

SKILL LEVEL

Anyone can do it
▶ Straightforward
Tricky in parts

TIME TAKEN

▶ 10 minutes

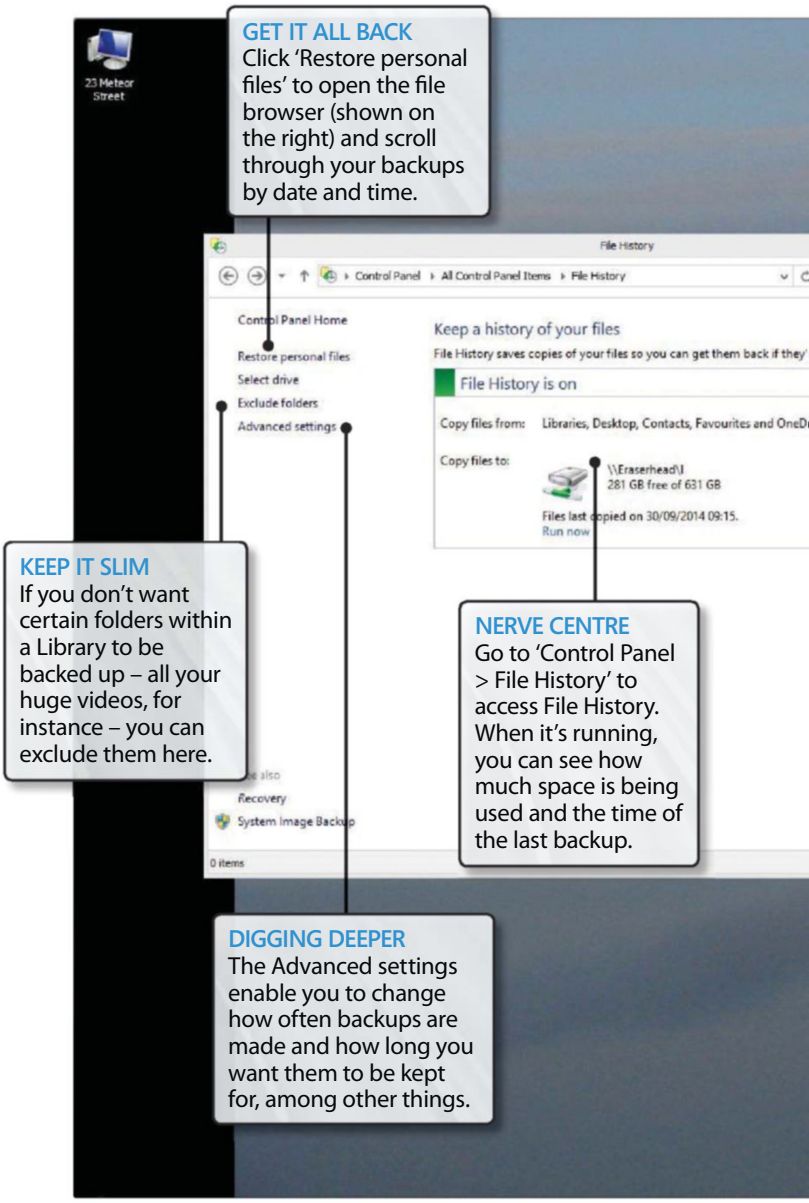
SUITABLE FOR

Windows 8
Windows 7
Windows Vista
Windows XP

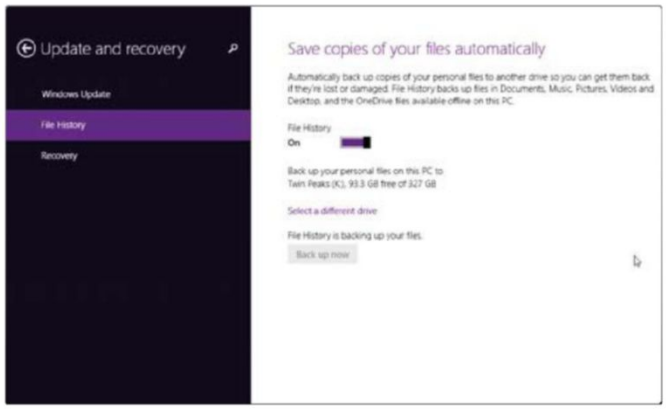
How often are you exhorted to regularly back up your data in case something goes wrong with your PC? And how often do you actually remember to do it?

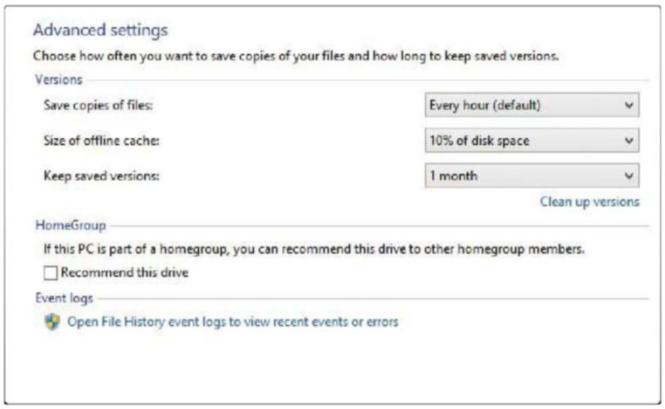
Fortunately, Windows 8 comes with an extremely handy built-in utility called File History that can take a lot of the pain out of the process. It automatically backs up the entire contents of all your **Libraries** to an **external drive** or USB stick every hour (using the default settings). If you ever want to recover an older version of a file, you can browse the backups by day and time to pinpoint the exact version you need.

Better yet, although File History is designed to work with an external drive, you can use File Sharing to 'fool' it into working with a second internal hard drive, if you have one installed. Once it's running you can pretty much forget about it – until you really need it, of course!



Step-by-step | Protect your data





1 Plug it in

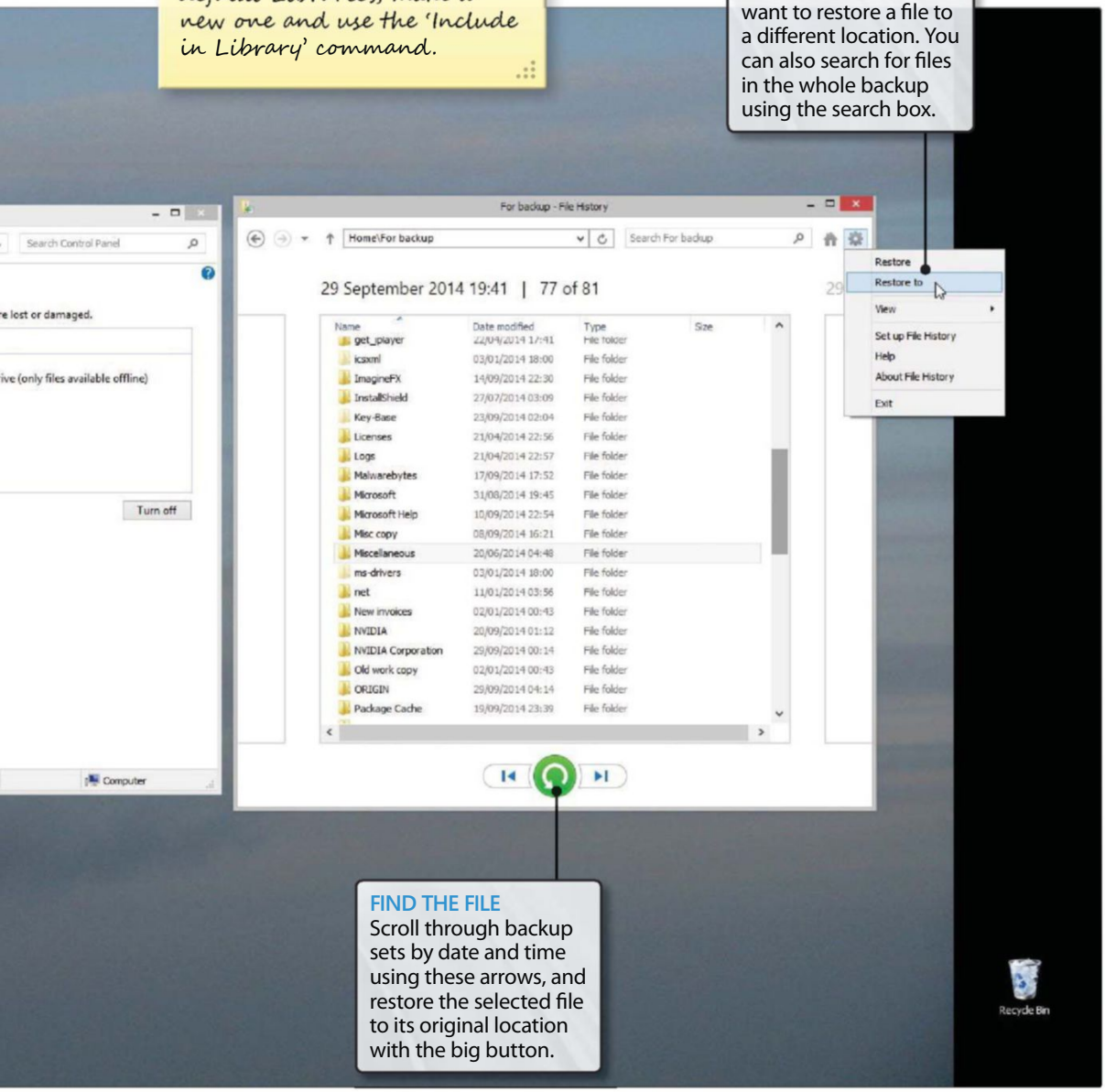
By default, File History uses an external drive. This can be a hard drive (perhaps the one you use for your normal backups) or a USB stick. If you opt for a stick, make sure it has plenty of free space: we recommend at least 8GB. Either way, make sure your drive is always plugged in (and powered on, if it's external), or there's no point in running File History in the first place!

2 Turn it on

From the Start screen, swipe in from the edge of the screen, select 'Search' and then type **file history settings**. You can do the same from the Windows 8 desktop by hitting the [Windows] key and typing **file history settings** into the search bar. Click the entry to open File History, then click 'Select a drive.' Choose one and that's it – your Libraries are now being backed up automatically.

ED'S BEST TIP!
To back up data not in your default Libraries, make a new one and use the 'Include in Library' command.

MOVING FILES
Click the cog if you want to restore a file to a different location. You can also search for files in the whole backup using the search box.



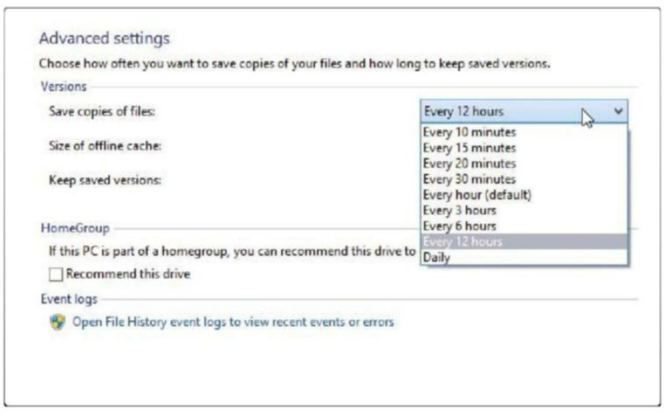
FIND THE FILE
Scroll through backup sets by date and time using these arrows, and restore the selected file to its original location with the big button.

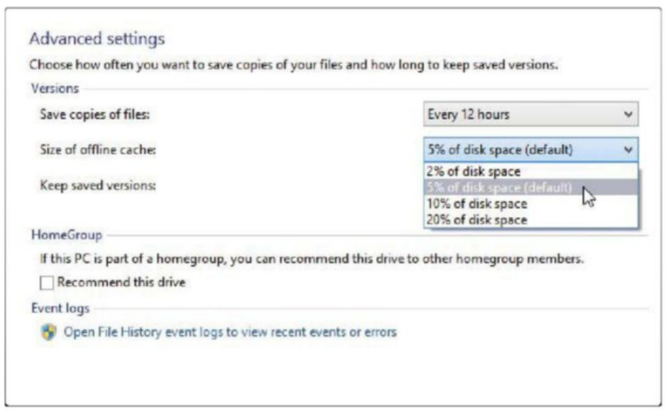
Jargon buster!

Offline cache
If File History can't immediately back up files to your external drive (because it's been disconnected, for instance), it temporarily stores the backup data in an offline cache, then transfers it whenever possible.

Libraries
Windows 8's way of virtually organising data such as music, pictures, videos and so on. Unlike a file folder, Libraries only 'point' to data stored elsewhere, so they're very flexible.

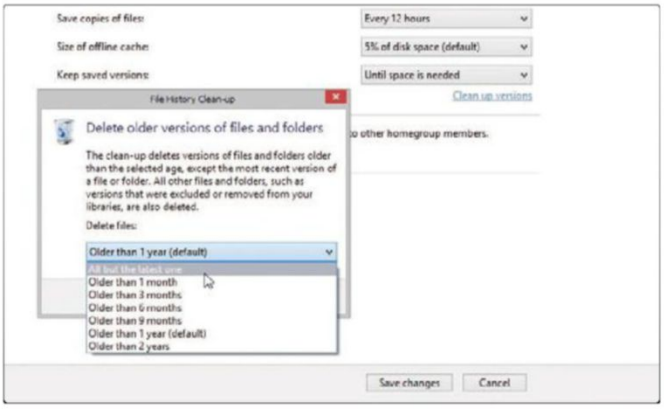
External drive
File History will never allow you to back up to your main Windows drive as that would be pointless, so you'll need an external drive for back-ups: either a hard disk or a (large) USB stick.





3 When to save?
You can further tweak File History by going to 'Control Panel > File History' and clicking 'Advanced settings'. Under 'Versions', you can choose how often to back up. In practice, setting this to 'Daily' or 'Every 12 hours' probably gives the best balance between security, performance and space-saving. If you're using a smaller USB drive, you might want to reduce the frequency of saves.

4 Caching in
If File History is unable to copy your data (if you've temporarily removed the backup drive, for example), it will still run, but will save the data to a temporary store on your main drive. As soon as File History can connect to your backup drive, this data is transferred. The setting 'Size of offline cache' specifies what proportion of your disk can be used for this purpose.



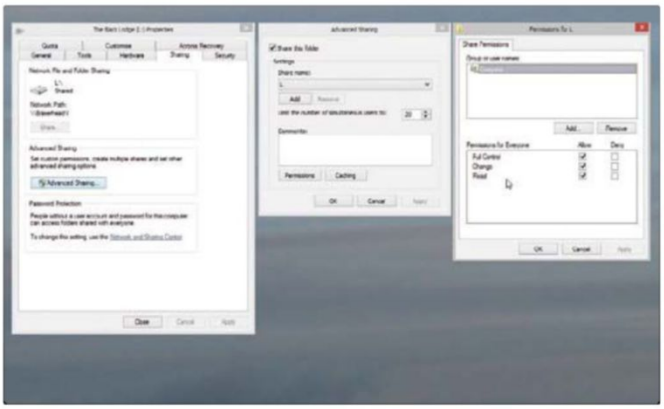
5 Old news

In 'Keep saved versions', you can specify if and when to delete older backups. For instance, if this is set to 'One month', you'll be able to see and restore back-up versions going back a month from the current date, but no earlier. Note the 'Clean up versions' option – here you can manually delete all versions older than a certain date, or all but the latest version.



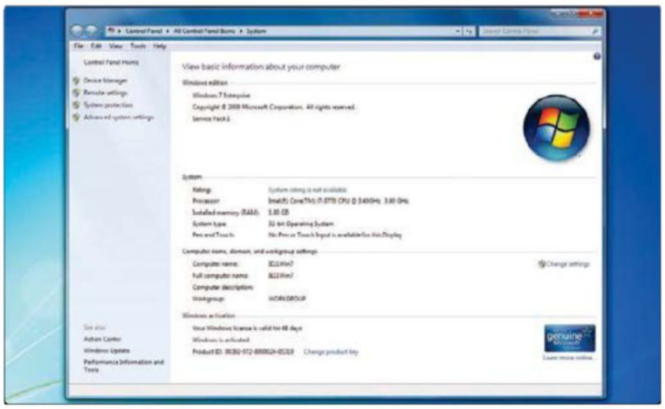
6 A different drive

As we've said, File History doesn't normally allow you to save to an internal disk drive, even if it's an additional drive that doesn't contain your Windows data, such as the M: drive shown here. One easy way around this is to set up the extra drive to be shared in Windows 8 so it can essentially act as a network connection, because File History does support networks.



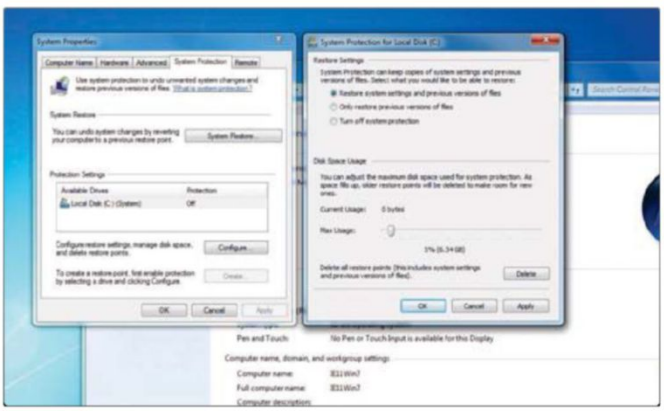
7 Sharing openly

First, open the extra drive's Properties page, then select the 'Sharing' tab. Click 'Advanced sharing', then tick 'Share this folder'. Click 'Permissions' and tick all the 'Allow' boxes. Close each box by clicking 'OK'. Now, back in File History click 'Add network location' rather than 'Select a drive'. Your extra internal disk will show up as a destination, so simply select it and proceed as normal.



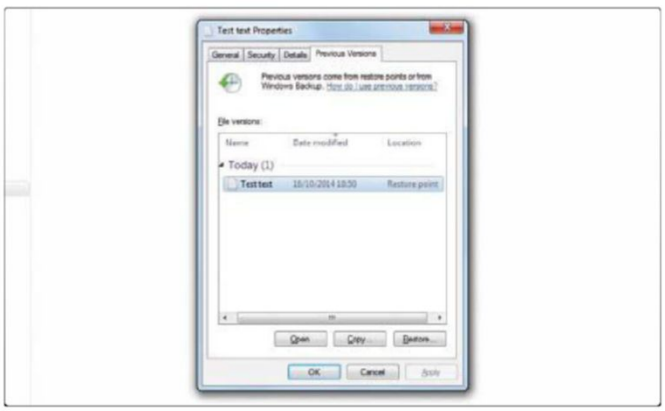
8 Backups in Windows 7

Windows 7 features a more primitive version of File History called Previous Versions, and it takes a bit of digging to make use of it. For Previous Versions to be available, you need to turn on Windows 7's System Protection feature, which takes snapshots of your drive(s) at regular intervals. First, open the Start menu in Windows 7, right-click 'Computer' and click 'Properties'.



9 Protect and survive

In the left pane, click 'System Protection'. Click the 'System Protection' tab, and then click 'Create'. Ensure your Windows drive is selected, then click 'Configure'. You can save system settings and data, or just data. Choose one then click 'OK', then 'OK' again in the System Properties box. Windows will now take regular snapshots of the drive, so you can roll back if something goes wrong.



10 Restore a previous version

Any time you want to restore an older version of a file, right-click it and select 'Properties', then the Previous Versions tab. Provided the file has changed since the last backup, all the versions that have been saved with restore points are shown in the list, and you can open it, copy it elsewhere, or restore the version to its original location. It might just come in handy! ■

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Learn how to...

Investigate and improve Windows 7's reliability



Your guide Jon Thompson says...

"Learn all about the Action Center – it's your one stop shop for all system messages, warnings and updates within Windows 7."

At a glance...

SKILL LEVEL

Anyone can do it
▶ Straightforward
Tricky in parts

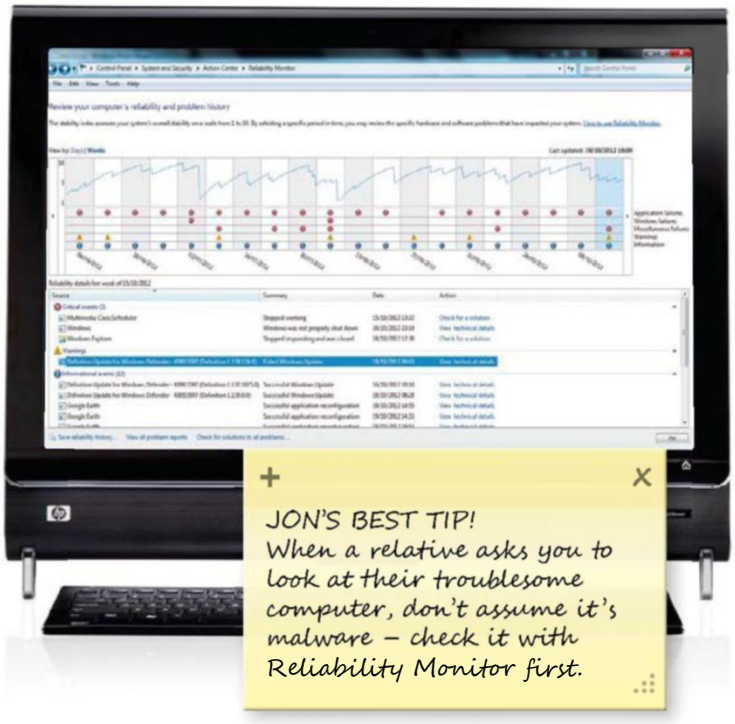
TIME TAKEN

▶ 1 hour

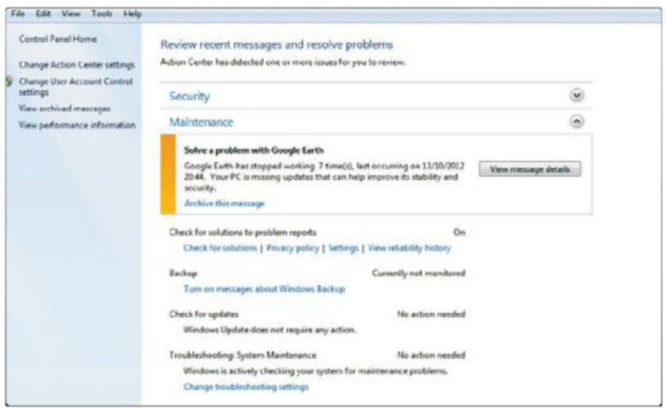
SUITABLE FOR

Windows 8
Windows 7
Windows Vista
Windows XP

Windows 7 is fast and reliable, but it's not perfect. Programs and services can still silently crash in the background and bring the whole thing to a halt, losing work and data. The problem is, if we don't know about these internal problems, we'll always be at their mercy. As I've certainly discovered, saving my work doesn't always ensure that it is committed to disk. It may only be sent to cache memory to await a larger disk write. Foul oaths and frustration follow. Windows 7 does contain built-in help, however, in the form of the Windows 7 Reliability Monitor. This little-known utility has saved me more than once from an unstable system, and it can do the same for you by pinpointing exactly what's gone wrong. It also gives you peace of mind that crashes and system foul-ups and driver issues, and not malware are causing your crashes.

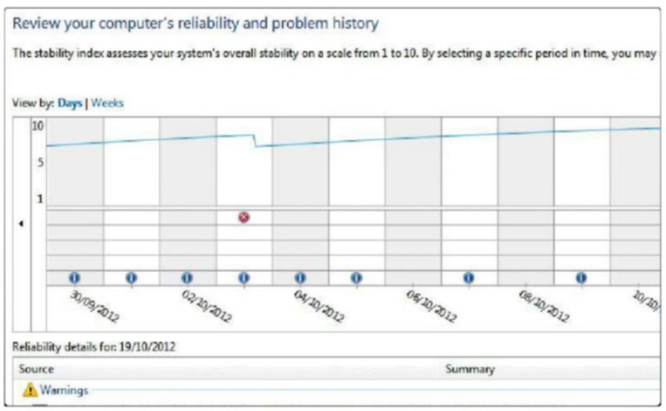


Step-by-step | Identify Windows 7 reliability issues



1 Open Performance Monitor

The Windows 7 Performance Monitor is buried away in the depths of the Control Panel. To open it, first open the control panel from the Start button. Once running, click the 'System and Security' section. Inside, click the 'Action Center' group and expand the 'Maintenance' section that appears. Here you'll find the option to view your PC's reliability.



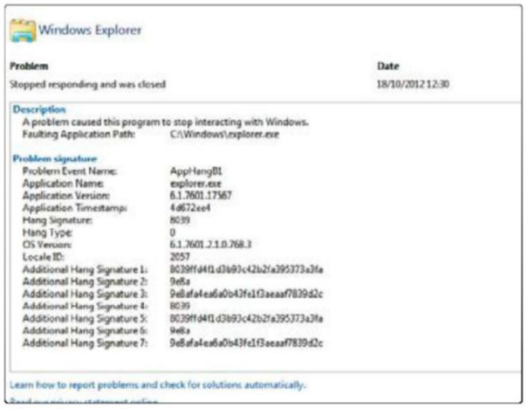
2 View Reliability History

Click 'View Reliability History'. This creates a report using the reliability data Windows 7 has stored. The report takes a minute or so to compile and display. Towards the top you'll see a graph that gives a simple indication of your computer's overall reliability. Underneath that is a chart of the different kinds of problem that are keeping your PC from scoring a perfect 10.



3 Weekly view

To get a fuller overview of system reliability, click the 'Weeks' option at the top of the screen. You can scroll back and forth over the weeks with the left and right arrow keys. To see the associated data, press [Enter] and a list of all the system problems the day or week contains appears in the lower pane.



4 Event details

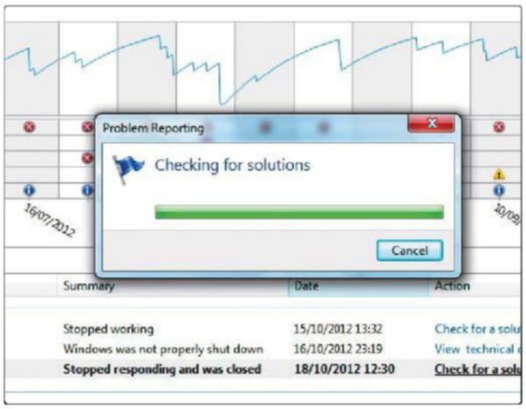
Critical events are ones that cause internal failures or complete operating system crashes. They're listed in the top three 'Failure' lines of the data table under the graph. Click on weeks when these occurred to see what they were. Double-click on an entry to see the technical details.

Jargon buster!

Service
Software that runs in the background and handles events that would disrupt your applications.

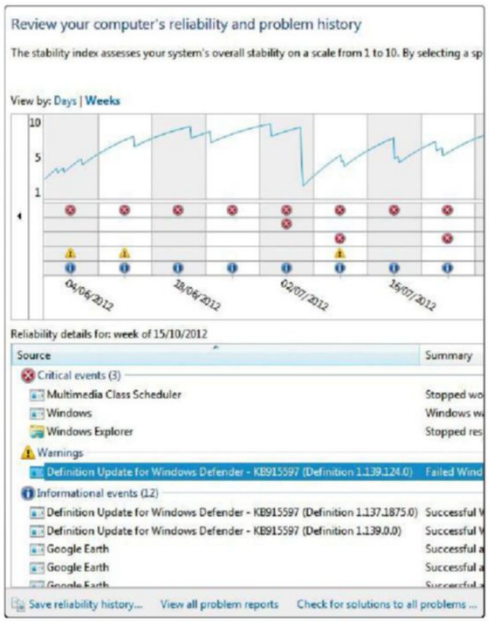
Reliability Monitor
Special recording software unique to Windows 7 that keeps a full history of updates, software reconfigurations and software failures, along with any other crashes and unexpected events.

Anonymous report
A message about a software crash that's sent to Microsoft.



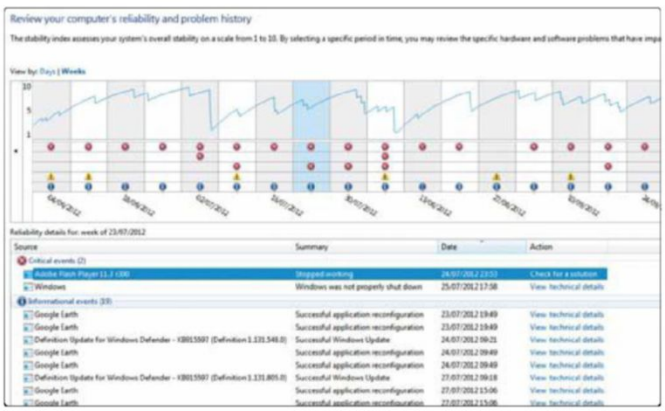
5 Check for solutions

Windows can help solve issues by accessing its online database of previous problems. To seek out a possible answer, click 'Check for a solution' in the Action column of the relevant entry in the lower pane. There's no guarantee that Windows can put things right itself, but it's worth a try.



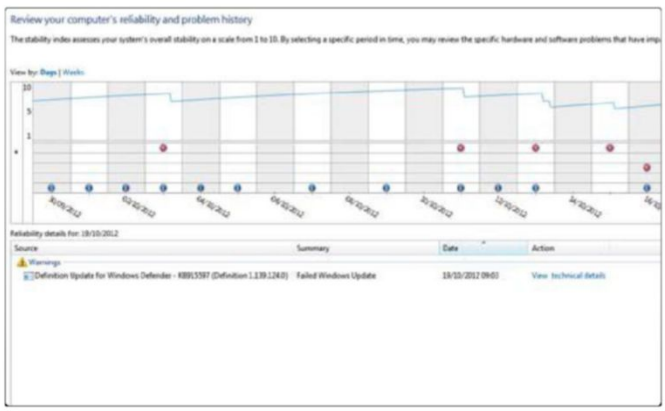
6 Windows Update problems

In order to keep your computer safe and secure, it's essential that your installation of Windows is updated with the latest patches. This should happen without any input from you, but if the automatic update process fails, you usually don't find out about it. Click on the weeks that are highlighted with a yellow warning triangle. Now look in the lower pane – are there any 'Failed Windows Update' entries? If so, make a note reminding yourself to update Windows manually later. It will take too long to do right now.



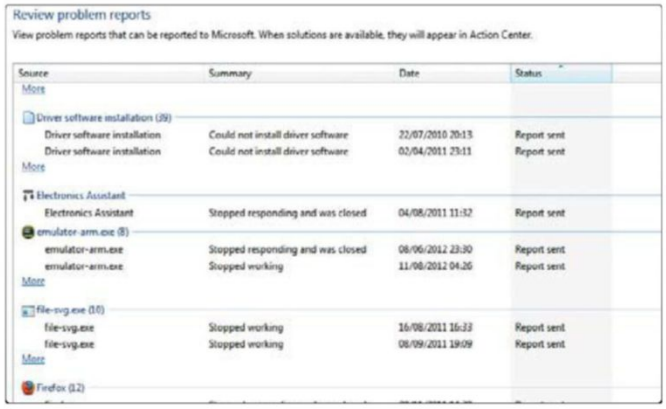
7 Update troublesome drivers

It's highly likely that as you step back through the reliability history you'll find certain drivers that keep crashing. Sometimes these crashes can cause system instability. This can also happen with browser plug-ins – Adobe Flash Player is a particular favourite. If you've not updated such software recently, add it to your list of potential updates for later.



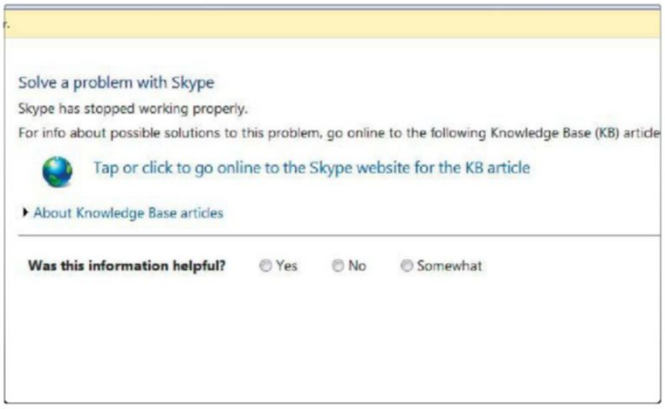
8 Investigate info messages

Select an entry where there are blue 'I' symbols in the data. As well as telling you about failures and warnings, Windows Reliability Monitor also tells you about things that have gone well. You can see how the system and applications have been updated automatically. In many cases, these updates happen silently, so this is the only notification you have that they succeeded..



9 Show all problems

At the bottom of the screen, you'll find the option to view all problem reports. This produces a long list of all the problems the operating system and installed software have encountered. You can sort this list by clicking a column title. You might find that an anonymous report has been sent to Microsoft to help the programmers concerned with system stability.



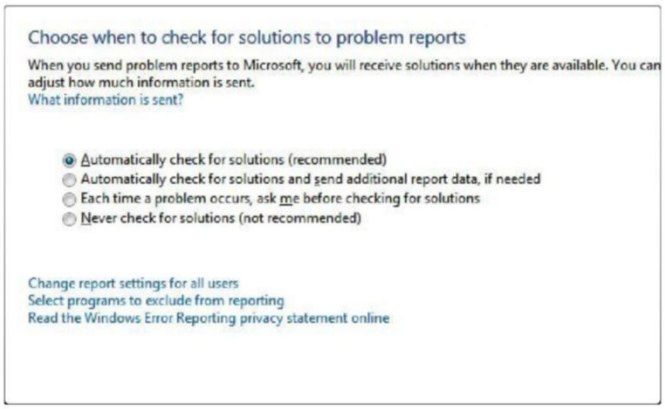
10 Identify available solutions

In the list of problem reports, you'll see solutions listed for certain applications and drivers. Find one and right-click it, then select 'View solution'. Windows Reliability Monitor accesses what's known about the problem. It might provide instructions for you to follow, or it may give you a link that will let you download a more recent version of the application.



11 Check all solutions

If you just want to see if there are any available solutions to the collection of problems your computer has encountered to date, on the main Reliability Monitor screen click 'Check for solutions to all problems'. Windows may need to send anonymous information to Microsoft to get solutions. If this is the case, click 'Send information' to receive any available answers.



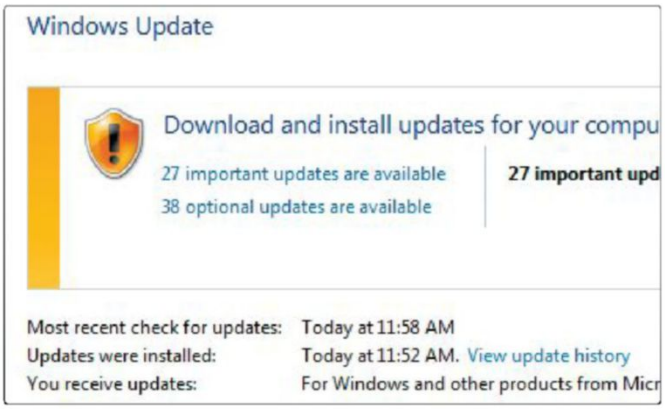
12 Set crash settings

When a program fails, Windows automatically starts looking for a solution, but this isn't always appropriate. Click the back button in Reliability Monitor and open the Maintenance section. Click 'Settings' to set the default behaviour when a program crashes. It's best to check for solutions as you go, but you can have Windows ask you what to do when something crashes.



13 Auto update applications

It's possible that installed software can update itself. To test this, open the application you want to update. In this case, we'll use Mozilla Firefox. Click the Firefox button and allow your cursor to rest on the Help menu. Select 'About'. It's usual for the About pane in many applications to either auto-update the software or to provide an update button



14 Update Windows manually

Finally, if you need to update Windows, it's time to do so. Click the back button at the top left of the screen, then click 'Windows Update' at the bottom left. Click 'Install Updates'. You may have to reboot when this is complete. Check with Reliability Monitor regularly to see if there have been any failures – especially with Windows updates– to keep your PC healthy. ■

Future

Windows Help & Advice

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Learn how to...

Fix hardware problems



Your guide Alan Dexter says...

"Mastering Device Manager is the best way of fixing hardware issues and making sure old drivers don't cause problems."

At a glance...

SKILL LEVEL

Anyone can do it
Straightforward
▶ Tricky in parts

TIME TAKEN

▶ 20 minutes

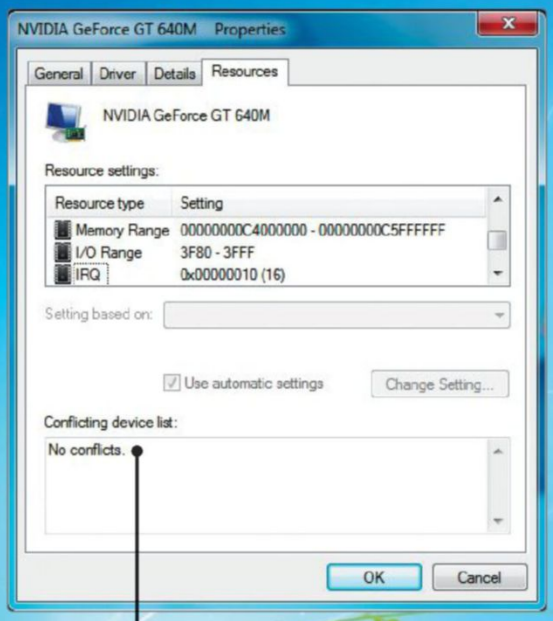
SUITABLE FOR

Windows 8
Windows 7
Windows Vista
Windows XP

Each piece of hardware inside your PC needs a software component, so that Windows knows how to access and use it properly. This software element is known as a **driver**, and it handles everything from solving little problems with the hardware that have been spotted after it was manufactured, through to providing some funky capabilities for that device, like letting you assign functions to any extra buttons on your mouse, enabling visual effects on your webcam, or making sure that the latest games run properly on your graphics card.

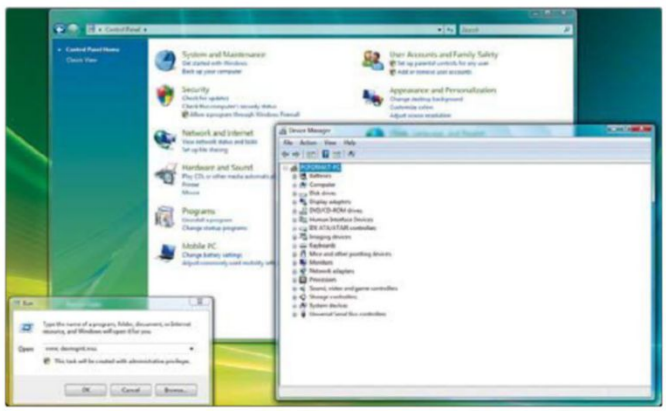
Handling all these drivers can be tricky, but Microsoft has created a handy tool to look after all the hardware in your machine and ensure there are no incompatibilities. That tool is the Device Manager, and I'm going to show you how to get the most from it. Let's get started!

CHANGES
The 'Scan for hardware changes' icon is mostly used when you've just uninstalled a device and want Windows to update its drivers. Simply click this and see which hardware devices are found.



CONFLICTS
If a device is causing a problem with another piece of hardware in your machine, then the conflicting device list under the **Resource tab** can be useful.

Step-by-step | Sort out hardware problems



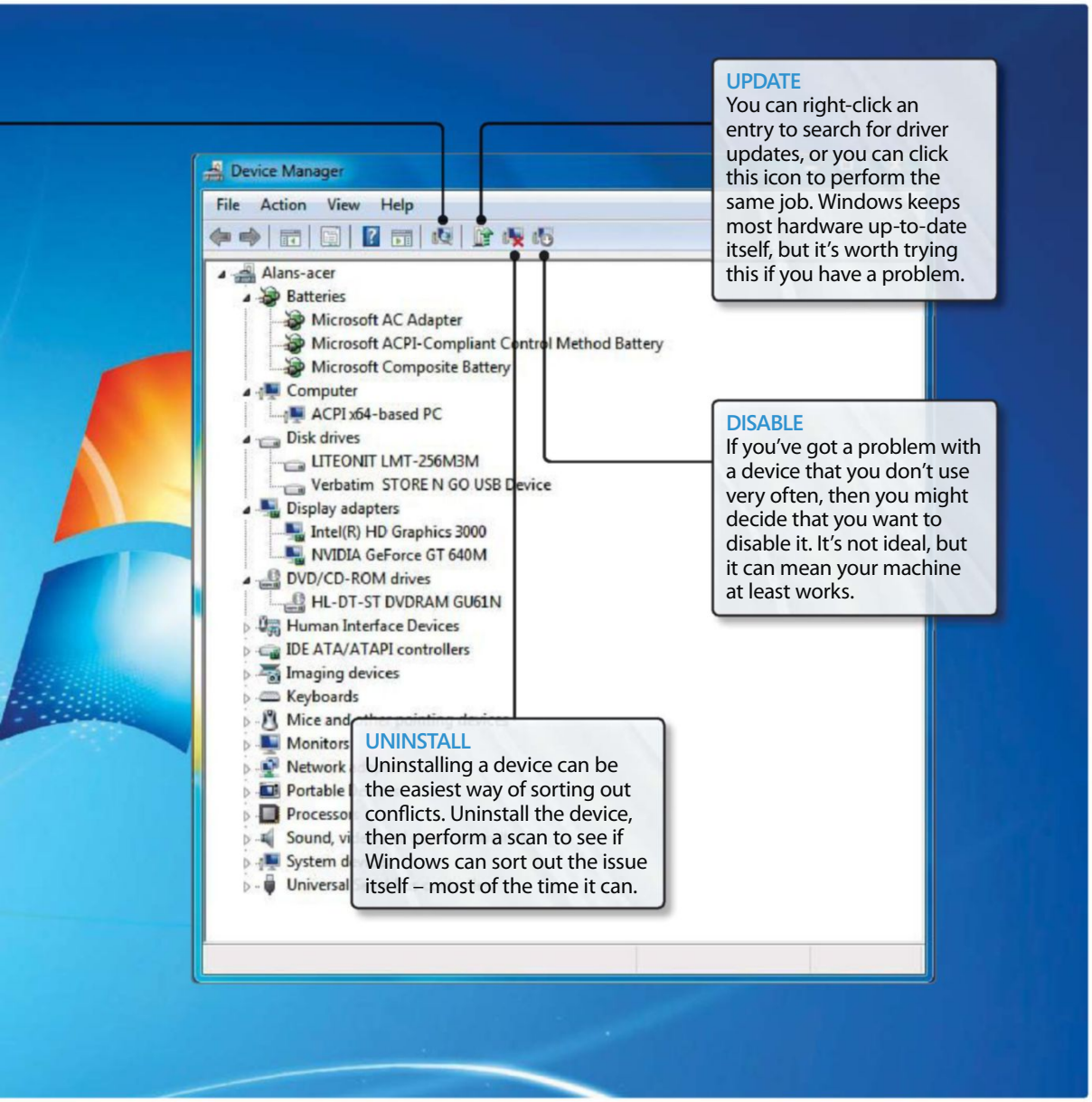


1 Launch Device Manager

There are several ways to access the Device Manager. The usual way is to click 'Start > Control Panel' and then, depending on your view, either select 'Hardware and Sound > Device Manager' or, if you have Control Panel showing the Classic View, select 'Device Manager' directly. You can also launch it from the Run command by typing mmc devmgmt.msc and hitting [Enter].

2 Find problem devices

The first thing you should do is get acquainted with Device Manager. It works in a similar way to Windows Explorer, with devices represented in a tree-like way, so you'll find your webcam, if you have one, under the Imaging Devices tree. Have a look around and see if there are any devices that have any marks next to them, which generally shows there's a problem or conflict.

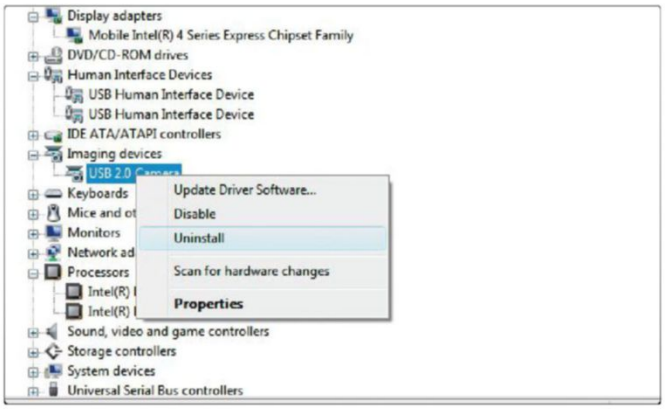


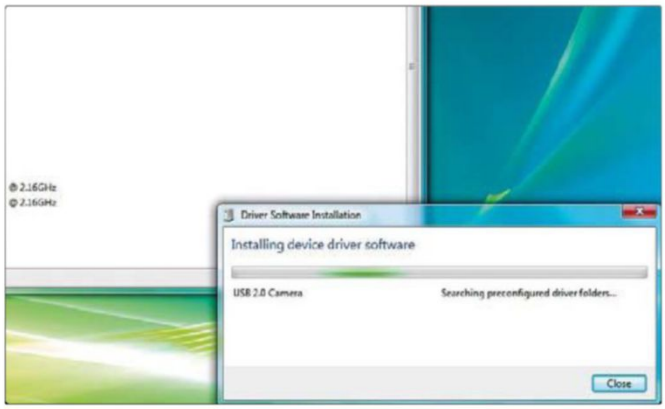
Jargon buster!

Driver
The software component for a hardware device, which enables Windows to use that device. The driver is generally produced by the hardware manufacturer, but Microsoft also produces a lot of standard drivers

Environment Variable
Windows uses The Registry to store most settings, but as the registry is so big and complicated for users, it makes sense to have some variables stored in this more accessible form.

Resource tab
Hardware devices in your PCs need access to certain resources to run. These are listed under the Resources tab for each device in the Device Manager. You generally can't change these, but any conflicts are listed here.



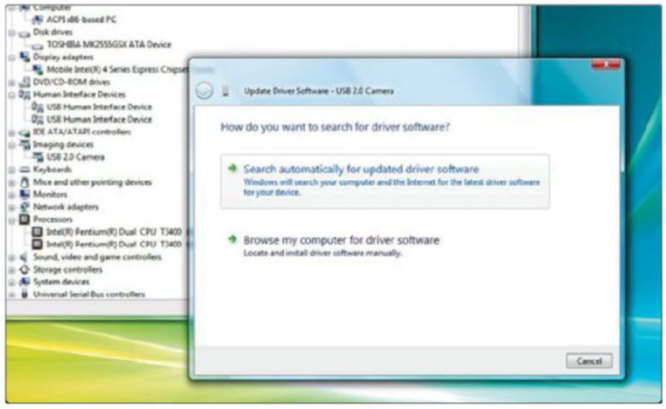


3 Uninstall a device

If you spot a problem, the easiest way to fix it is to uninstall the driver that goes with it. Simply expand the tree to show the item you want to fix, right-click the item itself and then select 'Uninstall' from the drop-down list. Don't worry, this won't do any serious harm, as the driver will still be available for that device and it's easy to reinstall it, as we'll see shortly.

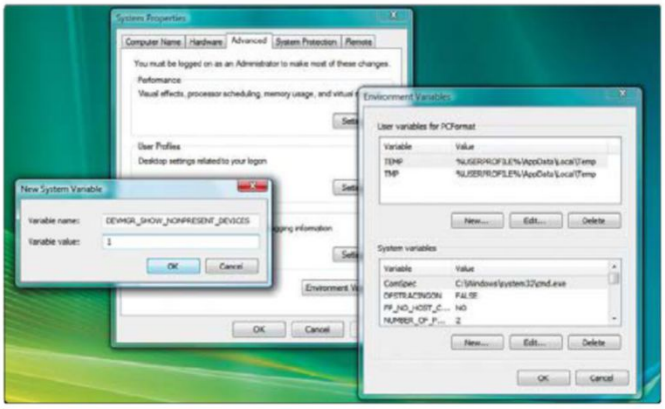
4 Scan for changes

Device Manager will now redraw its display and, if that was the only device under that branch, it will disappear. Don't worry though, to get it back, simply hit the 'Scan for hardware changes' button in the top button bar. This will check for new hardware, meaning it will find the device that you've just uninstalled and automatically try reinstalling the driver that you've just removed.



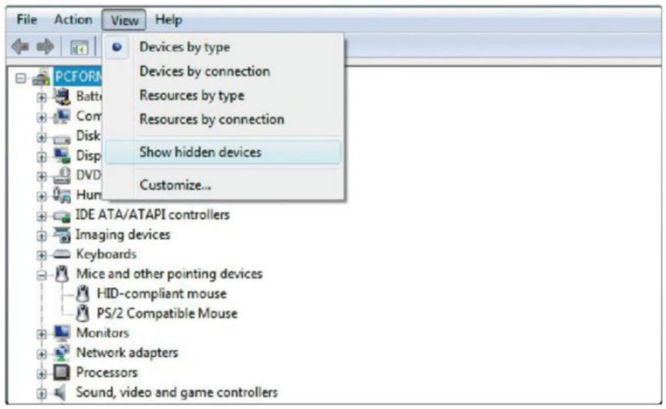
5 Update drivers

As the device is going to use the same driver, there's a chance that this won't solve the problem. The next stage therefore is to see if there's a newer driver available for that device. After your scan, simply right-click the device in question and select 'Update Driver Software' from the drop-down list. Elect to search automatically and confirm that it's fine to search online.



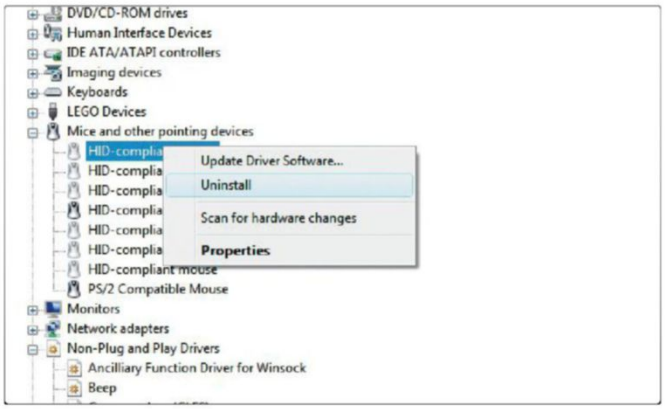
6 Old conflicts

Device Manager can also show devices that aren't currently connected. Close Device Manager first, then right-click 'My Computer', select 'Properties', click 'Advanced system settings' and select the '**Environment Variable**' button. Under 'System variable', click the 'New' button. Enter a variable name of DEVMGR_SHOW_NONPRESENT_DEVICES and set the Variable value to 1.



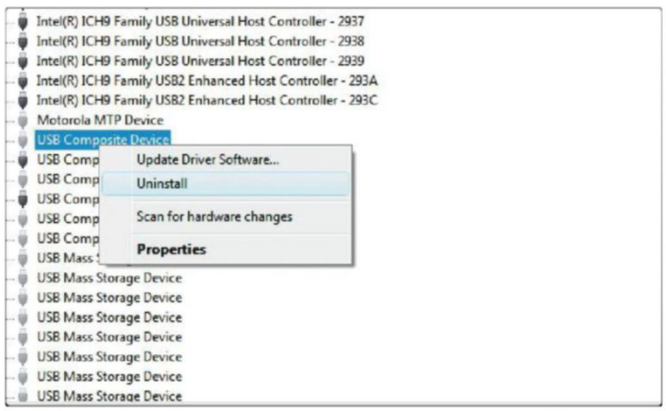
7 Show hidden devices

Start Device Manager as before. You probably won't see any difference straight away. In order to see those missing devices, you have to select 'Show hidden devices' from the View menu. This usually just shows system devices that you wouldn't normally touch, but thanks to our previous step, now shows devices that have been installed previously.



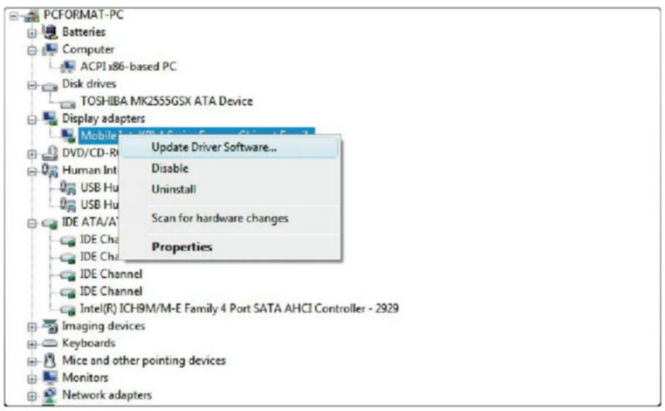
8 Remove old devices

arch through the list of devices for items that you know you no longer use. This is particularly useful if you've upgraded your PC, but still have old peripheral entries visible. If you're anything like us, you'll have several mice listed under 'Mice and other pointing devices'. Pick an item you know you no longer use, right-click it and select 'Uninstall' from the drop-down list.



9 USB fun

Another tree that's likely to contain an alarming number of entries is Universal Serial Bus controllers. Every USB stick you've ever plugged into your machine has its own driver stored here. Deleting these can reduce the time your PC takes to recognise a new USB stick, and also solves any problems you've had with USB drives. Use the [Delete] key to uninstall them quickly.



10 Job done

Well done, you've not only learned how to remove and update drivers that may be causing problems with your machine, but you've also seen how you can get rid of devices that you don't even use anymore. This is great if you've had problems with some hardware in the past, but also means your machine can be quicker at recognising some devices that you plug in. ■

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Learn how to...

Discover music in Windows 8



Your guide Christian Hall *says...*

"We have access to more music than ever before, and you can discover new tracks straight from the Start screen."

At a glance...

SKILL LEVEL

- Anyone can do it
- Straightforward
- Tricky in parts

TIME TAKEN

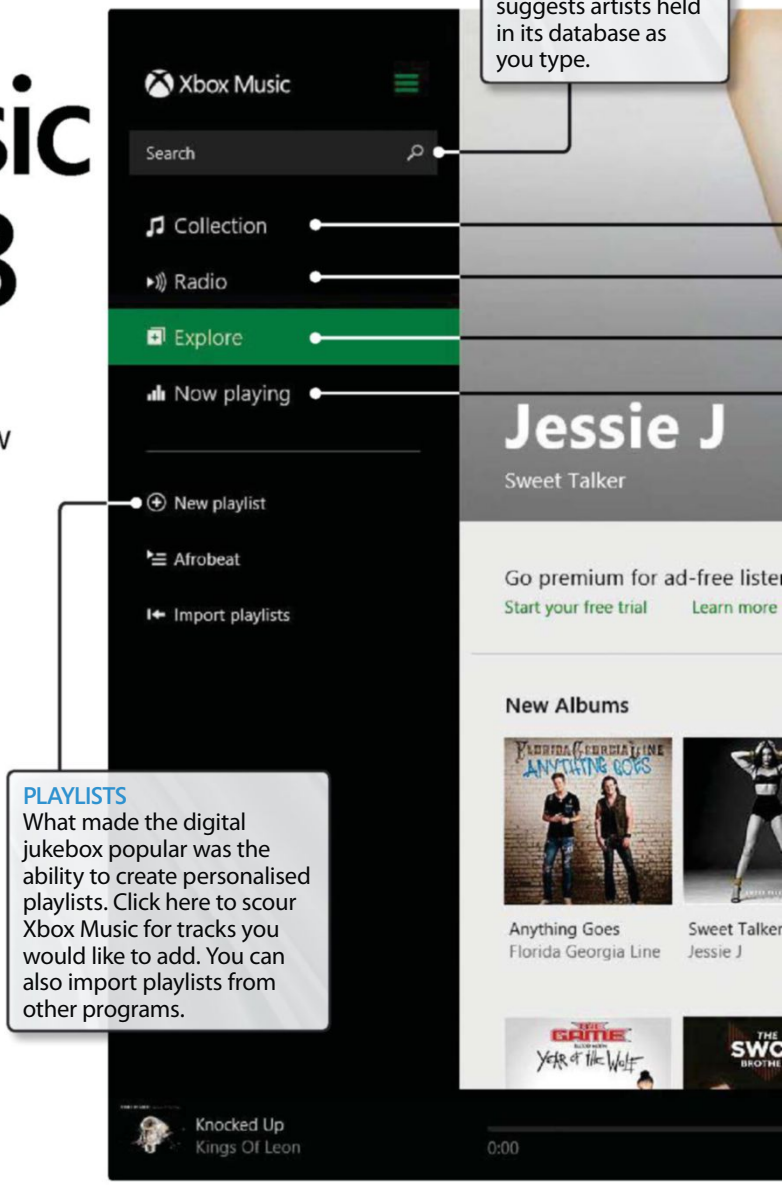
20 minutes

SUITABLE FOR

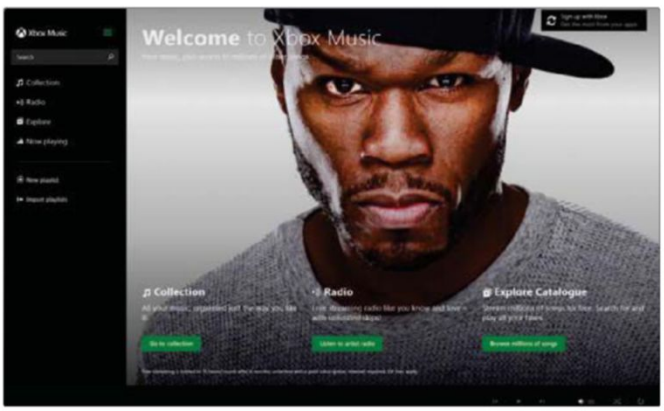
- Windows 8
- Windows 7
- Windows Vista
- Windows XP

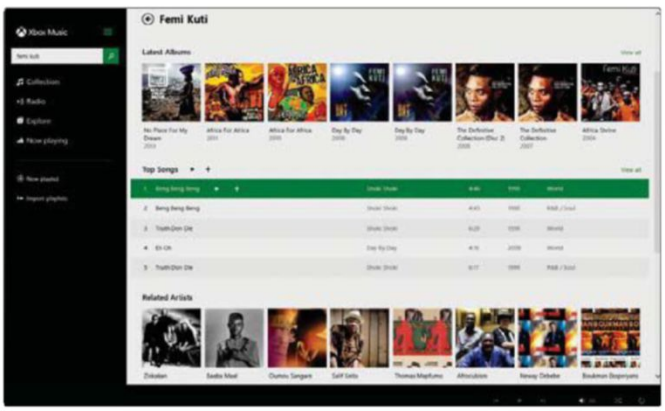
Streaming services such as Last.fm and Spotify have dominated the music scene over the last few years, but you don't need one of those accounts to enjoy music streams in Windows. Xbox Music gives you access to millions of songs to stream completely free with Windows 8's Music app and on the web at http://music.xbox.com. Search for any artist, song, or full album and instantly play what you want. You can even create and save **playlists** for easy access to the songs you love.

Xbox Music brings you all the music you love in one simple app. It's easy to play and manage music from your personal collection and, of course, browse and buy songs from the Xbox Music store. As with Spotify, limits on free streaming apply. The Xbox Music Pass gives you ad-free streaming for £8.99/$9.99 per month, which is slightly more affordable than Spotify Premium.



Step-by-step | Discover music with Windows 8



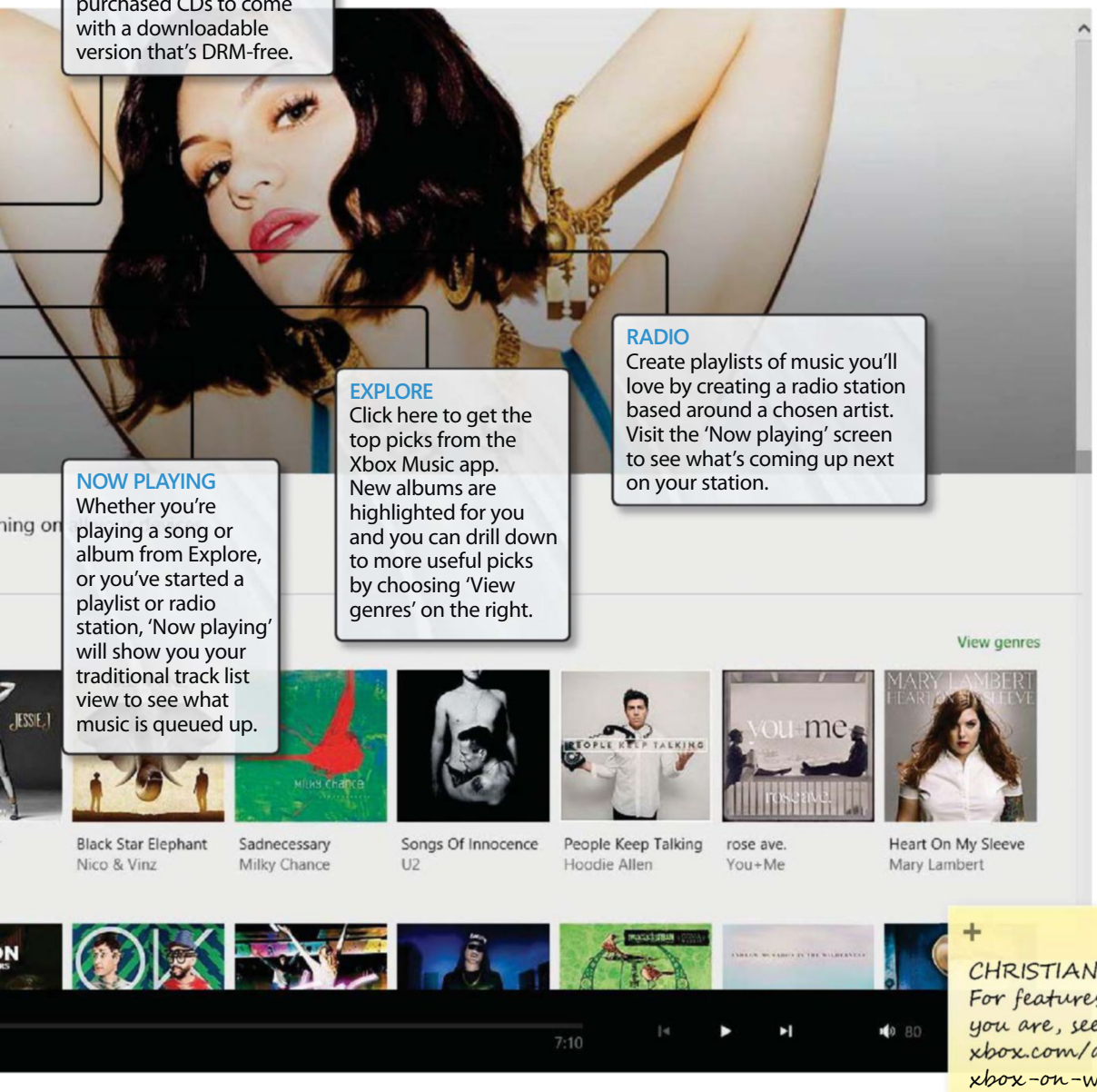


1 Launch the Music app

Open the Windows 8 Start screen and find the Music app (an orange tile with headphones). If it doesn't show up in your list of tiles, type the word **music** to search for it. Click the tile and you'll launch the fullscreen Xbox Music app. You'll see a welcome screen. If you have an Xbox account you'll be prompted to log in, but you only need a Microsoft account to use the service though.

2 Find and play a track

On the left you'll see the main navigation, and at the top is the search field. Just type the name of an artist or album and you'll see suggestions appear. Press [Enter] to run the search, or choose from the list. You might be presented with several possible results, so choose one to see the artist's discography, with their most recent albums listed first.



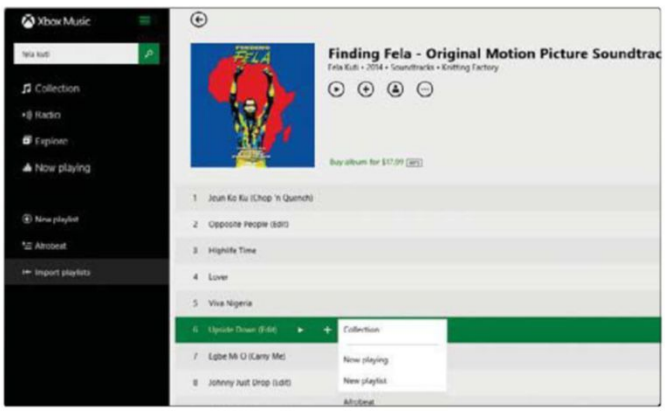
Jargon buster!

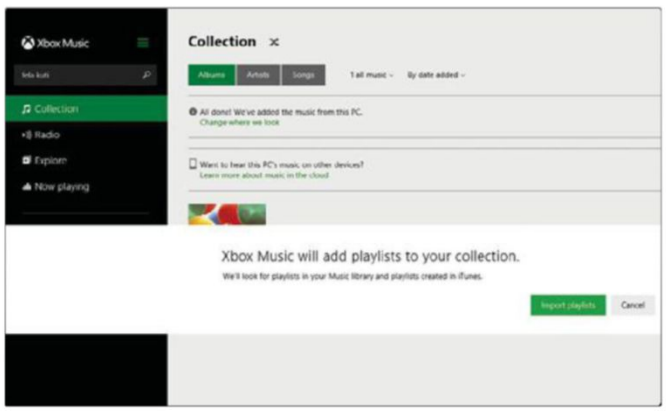
Playlist
Either a track list compiled by the user or one created by a program like Xbox Music or iTunes.

DRM
Digital Rights Management is applied to digital music tracks to tie them into a specific store so that those tracks can only be played on the owners devices. DRM-free music enables users to put their music onto more devices and programs.

Live tile
On the Windows 8 Start screen, each Live tile displays a thumbnail image that alternates with the app's icon. In Music, the Live tile for pinned playlists will feature an image of the artist.

CHRISTIAN'S BEST TIP!
For features available where you are, see http://support.xbox.com/apps/windows-8/xbox-on-windows-features.



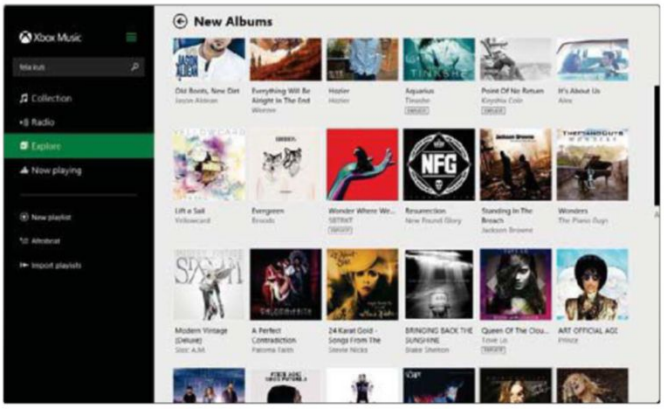


3 Using playlists

Digital jukeboxes (and iTunes in particular) have made playlists essential for music lovers. They work here in the way you would expect. Select 'New playlist' from the left-hand side and then give the playlist a name. To add a song to your new playlist, return to the list of tracks by an artist, select a track and hit the '+' button, then choose your playlist from the drop-down list.

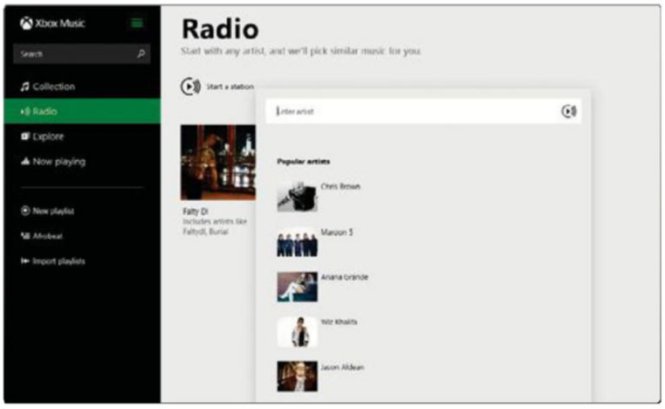
4 Import playlists

Xbox Music also supports playlists created in iTunes or Windows Media Player, but not Spotify. Choose 'Import playlist' from the left-hand menu and you'll then see a pop-up window asking you to import again. This process is automatic and you can't choose which playlists to import. You can, however, delete any imported playlists you don't want to keep.



5 Explore new music

The real fun in Xbox Music comes when you start to discover new tunes. This is done by through the Explore and Radio features. Explore is home to the Xbox Music picks from MSN. Here you'll be introduced some of the most popular and highly rated songs and albums. Just click on one of the artist/album covers to see full track listings and play the music.



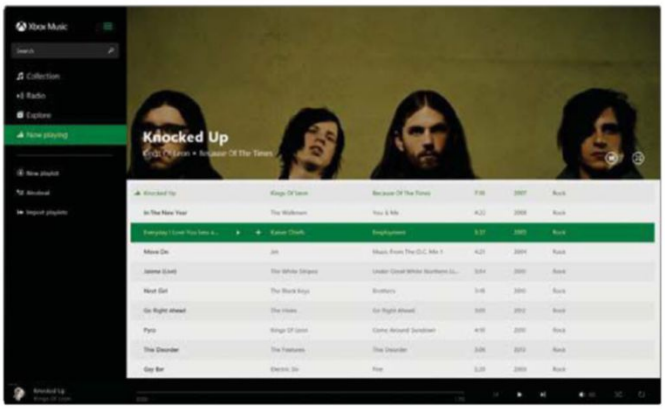
6 Build a radio station

Just like Spotify's radio feature, Xbox Music enables you to discover new music through related artists. Choose Radio from the left-hand menu and type an artist then hit [Enter]. Click the 'Play' icon and a playlist will play based on that core artist you selected. You can't actually see the list on this Radio view, instead you click on 'Now playing' in the left-hand menu.



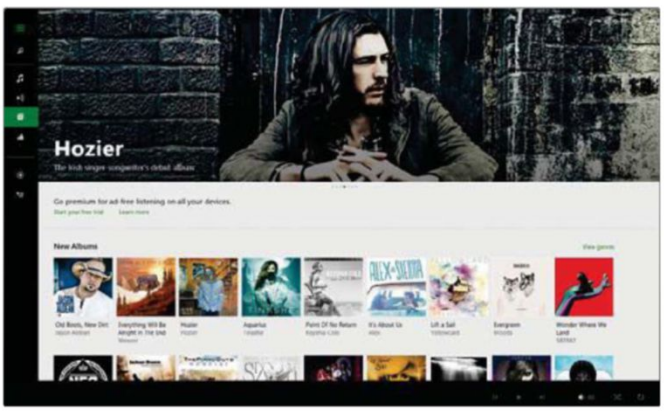
7 Pin station to Start

If you really love the results of the radio station based on a particular artist, you can save the station as a tile in your Start screen for easy access in future. Right-click and choose 'Pin to Start'. Then, on the Start screen you can left-click to play the station. You can right-click to unpin it, change the tile size or turn off the Live tile element (which updates its image).



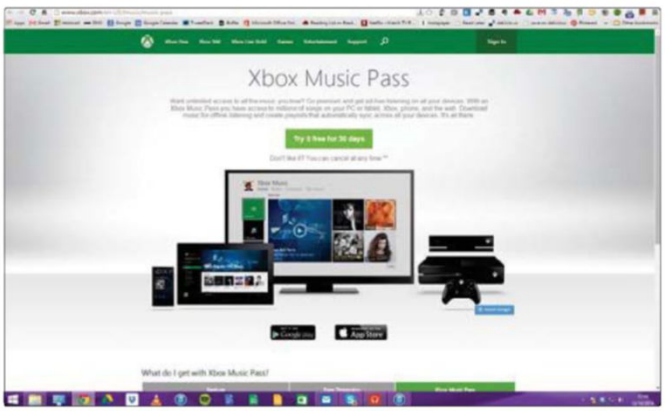
8 The 'Now playing' screen

The final option you'll see listed in the left-hand menu is 'Now playing', which is the place to visit whenever you have chosen a piece of music to listen to. This is where you'll find the full track listings, which is especially useful for the Radio and Playlist options if you want to see what's coming up, and go back to replay your favourite tracks.



9 Tweak the menu

There's not a great deal you can do in the way of customisation within the Xbox Music app itself, but you can collapse the sidebar menu for a larger view of the main area. Simply click the three lines to the right of the words 'Xbox Music'. Most settings are still available in the slimline menu, but the option to import playlists disappears.



10 Go Premium

As with Spotify, not all of the app's features are available in the free version. Sign up for an Xbox Music Pass and you'll get unlimited ad-free listening on all your Windows devices. You can also download music for offline listening and create playlists that automatically sync across all your devices. There's a 30-day free trial available if you want to try it out before buying. ■

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ONEDRIVE

Use Microsoft's cloud storage system to access your files wherever you are

As Microsoft's own online storage offering, OneDrive joins the likes of Dropbox, Google Drive and BT Cloud in the scramble to get your files backed up in the cloud – that nebulous term for banks of storage racks humming away in a data centre... somewhere.

OneDrive has been through a couple of different incarnations since its launch in 2007. You might remember it as SkyDrive, which was its codename before it became available for beta-testing as Windows Live Folders. It became Windows Live SkyDrive very shortly after launch. The 'Windows Live' part of the name was quietly dropped, and SkyDrive rumbled on through the launches of Windows 7 and 8 until 2013, when a case in the High Court in London determined that the name infringed BSkyB's 'Sky' trademark. From these Murdoch-stoked ashes rose OneDrive, and that moniker has stuck.

Cloud storage is important for anyone who wants an off-site backup of important information they can't afford to lose. This might be your accounts, irreplaceable photographs or home movies. OneDrive protects you against data loss by saving multiple copies across its servers, so if one fails there's always another to take its place. Your data is hidden behind a password and two-step authorisation system (if you enable it) so only you can access it, and thanks to mobile apps, everything stored there can be at your fingertips wherever you are, on any device. You can think of OneDrive as an extra 15GB of storage for your smartphone; the files from your PC can be delivered over its data connection with a few taps.

If you're a Windows 8.1 user, you'll find that OneDrive is built in, and if you use a Microsoft account to log in to your computer it will use OneDrive to sync your files and settings across multiple PCs. If you're using an older version of Windows, there's a desktop app that offers file syncing.

THEM ALL

ONEDRIVE IN WINDOWS 8.1

Microsoft has made the cloud an integral part of its latest OS

For Windows 8.1 users, OneDrive is transparent as long as you're signed in with a Microsoft Account. Set it to run automatically in the background, backing up your documents and settings, and you'll never even know it's there.

Bring up the Start screen, and start typing OneD... by the time you've got that far through its name, Windows will have displayed three options at the right of the screen: OneDrive itself, and two lots of settings. If you're already signed in, it's worth paying a trip to the settings to make sure you're getting the most from the service.

Click on 'OneDrive Storage Space', and you'll enter the part of the PC Settings app dedicated to OneDrive. First up is your free space. You get 15GB by default, although there are ways to expand this (see 'Get more OneDrive storage' on p62). That's quite a lot of storage though, as you're only going to use it for documents and data rather than for installing programs or operating systems.

There's only one option on this page (underneath the prominent 'Buy more storage' button), and that's 'Save documents to OneDrive by default'. It's worth having this switched on so that all your documents go into the cloud as well as being stored locally on your hard drive. If you've got more than one Windows 8.1 PC, logging into them all with the same account means your documents will be automatically synced between the computers, meaning you'll never need to run upstairs to switch on the desktop computer to find a spreadsheet when you could be sitting in the garden with your laptop instead.



SEARCHING WINDOWS **In Windows 8.1, it's easier than ever to find what you're after**

PC settings can also be synced between computers, including things like desktop icons and wallpaper, making it feel like all your computers are one computer and removing the need to make the same change on all your systems.

Click 'Sync Settings' on the right of the PC Settings app and you'll see a long line of options with simple yes/no options. If you want your PCs to feel familiar, with no differences in wallpaper, Start screens or even things like mouse acceleration settings, then turn all these options to 'On'. The last one is especially interesting: 'Back up settings' means that you can save all your PC settings to OneDrive without having them synced across multiple computers. You can restore the settings to your PC if you ever need to replace its hard drive, or reinstall the operating system for another reason, making your 'new' computer just like your old one.

Jumping back up one level, the option above Sync Settings is Camera Roll. This automatically uploads your pictures from your PC hard drive to OneDrive, and 15GB can hold a lot of photos.

Once photo uploading is turned on, you can forget about it. Every time you save a new photograph to your PC, it will appear online a little later, depending on the speed of your internet connection. Once it's there, it will also be available to any other PCs or devices you're logged in to with the same Microsoft account.

Photo uploading also works the other way – images taken on your phone can be synced to your desktop PC without having to connect the two with a cable. This is where the final option in OneDrive's settings comes into play: Metered Connections.

If you're using Windows 8.1 on a tablet or laptop with a SIM card slot, you might not want uploaded photos running up your phone bill. Metered Connections gives you options for controlling this, allowing your device to synchronise settings, for example, while turning off photo or movie uploading while you're using 3G.

WHAT ABOUT WINDOWS 7?



Microsoft hasn't forgotten about the legions of users Windows 7 still commands. While the venerable operating system doesn't have the full OneDrive functionality of Windows 8.1, there's still an app you can download to gain at least some of the cloud backup features.

To get started with OneDrive, point your Windows 7 PC's web browser to www.onedrive.com, where you can either sign in with an existing account or create a new one. You don't have to do that yet though – just click 'Get OneDrive on your devices', then 'Download OneDrive for Windows' on the left-hand side.

A setup file will download, which you can double-click to run, and the app will install. You'll need to provide the app with account details and choose a location for the OneDrive folder on your hard drive. Any files you copy into this OneDrive folder will be mirrored on the OneDrive website, and any you upload from mobile devices will appear here once synchronisation has taken place.

If you've got a lot of data stored in the cloud that you don't want to appear on your hard drive, you can use OneDrive's selective sync feature to limit what gets downloaded. Right-click the OneDrive icon in the notifications area, then select 'Settings > Choose Folder > Choose Folders'. Here you can decide which folders stay in the cloud, and which ones are synced for you to use.

OFFICE ONLINE

It's Microsoft Office, in your web browser

Since 2010, Microsoft has offered a cut-down version of its Office suite that runs in your web browser and saves its files to OneDrive. Office Online is completely free to use, and for general word processing and light spreadsheet use, it's the only office suite you'll need (as long as you're connected to the internet).

To use Office Online, head to www.office.com and click the tile for the application you want to use. You might have to sign in with your Microsoft account if you haven't already done so. You'll be offered the choice between templates or a blank document, just as you would in the desktop version of Office, and the apps behave very like their full-fat cousins – the ones Microsoft would like you to pay for.

Office Online documents are saved in the Documents part of your OneDrive folder as ordinary files (.docx, .xslx, etc), just like the desktop equivalents would. This means you can write up a proposal and send it by email as a simple attachment to be opened on the recipient's PC. And while it's not made very clear, you can rename a file by clicking its name on the browser app's blue header bar, so you don't end up with lots of files just called 'Document'.

There's something else OneDrive can do that's a little more clever. You can use it to embed documents into websites, making it easy to display information that can be edited in Office Online rather than tinkering with HTML.

From your Office Online document, select 'File' (that's Office Online's File menu, not your web browser's) then 'Share'. Hit the blue 'Generate' button, and you'll be prompted to select a width for your document in pixels. When you're happy, copy the code from the bottom of the window, and paste it into a page of your website. Your text, table, presentation or diagram will now be visible to anyone who visits your site.



OFFICE ONLINE Microsoft's suite of programs are available as free online apps, with a few features trimmed out

GET FREE SPACE FROM MULTIPLE CLOUD SERVICES



BOX

Box has been around since 2005 and currently offers 10GB with a free personal account. The size of each file, however, is limited to 250MB. This makes it less useful for archiving movie files, which can be very large. In comparison, OneDrive and Dropbox allow files up to 10GB each. You can expand Box to unlimited storage with a paid-for enterprise account.



iCLOUD

Apple recently expanded its online storage offering, with 5GB available for free and 20GB for 79p a month. If you're an iPhone user you'll already have an iCloud account attached to your Apple ID, but iCloud doesn't work like other cloud storage offerings. There's no simple folder syncing here, even through the Windows app.



AMAZON CLOUD DRIVE

Amazon offers 5GB for free and paid plans ranging from 20GB for £6 a year up to a whopping 1TB for £320 a year. Geared more toward photo and video backup rather than general file storage, Amazon offers apps for mobile devices, but documents other than photos and videos won't appear on mobiles even if they're in your drive. Only eight devices are allowed access to your account at any one time.

IFTTT AND ONEDRIVE

Automate your cloud backups



AUTOMATED Save pictures from your preferred service straight to OneDrive

If This Then That (www.ifttt.com) is an extremely handy online service that can automate the interactions between other online services. This sounds like madness, but a simpler way of thinking about it is that, if you want, all the pictures you're tagged in on Facebook can be saved directly to OneDrive.

The service keeps running until you tell it to stop, so any pictures you're tagged in future will be saved to OneDrive too, and from there appear on your hard drive.

IFTTT uses 'recipes' to do its work, and at the time of writing there were 643 available that make use of OneDrive, from saving all your Instagram photos to OneDrive, to Gmail attachments (useful for immediately opening Office documents in Office Online), to Bing's image of the day. You can even save tracks from Soundcloud direct to OneDrive, if they're available for download.

If you're looking for a really secure off-site backup plan, you could even use IFTTT to synchronise the contents of your OneDrive with another cloud storage system, such as Dropbox, mirroring your files between the two and knowing nothing will be lost.

GET MORE ONEDRIVE STORAGE

Until the end of September 2014, any user who activated automatic picture uploading to OneDrive, would be rewarded with an extra 15GB of free space, for a total of 30GB. Sadly that's now passed, but there are other ways you can boost its capacity.

Referring your friends is the easiest, and is free. On www.onedrive.com, click the Get more storage link at the bottom of the right-hand sidebar. You can earn a 500MB bounty for anyone who signs up for the service from one of your referral links – something that's well worth having even though it might take a lot of friends to match the 15GB of free capacity.

The alternative is to pay for it. Extra storage can be bought from the OneDrive website, or through the OneDrive storage space app we looked at on page 60. Either way, the only way to access truly huge amounts of storage, enough to back up whole hard drives' worth of data, is to pay for it, and this is likely to be the choice of the professional who can't risk losing images, movies or audio data.

A terabyte of space will set you back £7.99 a month. It's not a huge amount of money, and this includes a subscription to Office 365 for five users – each of whom gets the full 1TB.

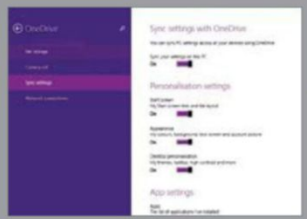
There are cheaper options available. £1.99 or £3.99 a month gets you 100GB or 200GB of storage space respectively (in addition to your free 15GB), but without the Office subscription.



FINAL FRONTIER It's easy to get more space completely free

TIPS AND TRICKS

SELECTIVE SYNC

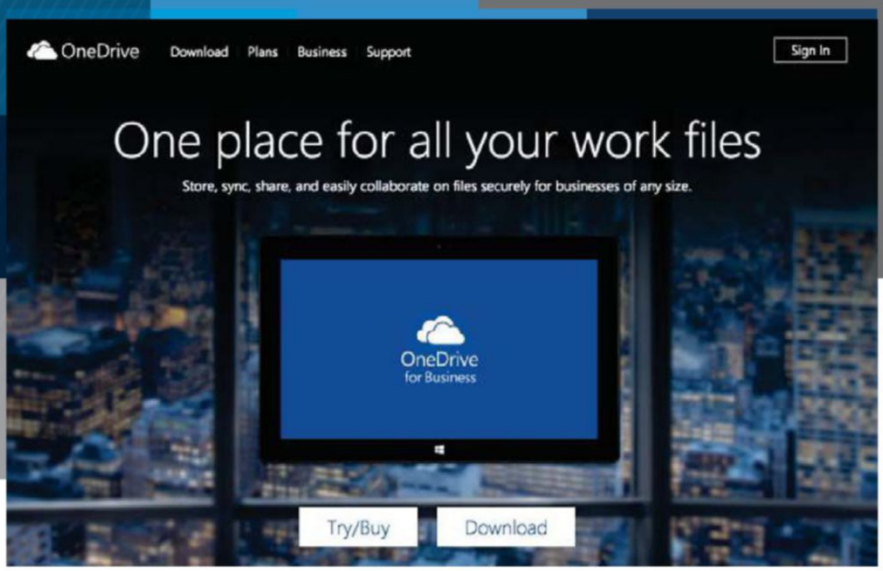


In Windows 8.1, you'll notice that your OneDrive folder has a new column in the Details view: 'Availability'. Right-click a file or folder, and the context-sensitive menu has new options: 'Make available offline', and 'Make available online-only'. The former means the file is always downloaded, while the latter means it won't be, but will be available from the OneDrive website.

VERSIONING



Shared documents are vulnerable to being overwritten, but OneDrive allows you to roll a file back to an earlier version, potentially saving hours of work. Head to www.onedrive.com and log in. Find the document in question, right-click it and select 'Version history'. The document will open in a new browser tab, with a sidebar that lets you see earlier saved versions of the file.



ENTERPRISE **OneDrive for Business offers many tools and services not included in the home version**

ONEDRIVE FOR BUSINESS

Those about to work, we salute you

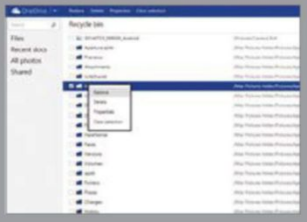
OneDrive for Business can be seen as a company's fileserver, but online and accessible from anywhere. This enterprise version of OneDrive is fundamentally different to the consumer edition we've discussed in the rest of this feature, though. Although they're both available under the same OneDrive banner, OneDrive for Business runs on Microsoft's older Sharepoint application framework, first launched in 2001. In fact, if you search for OneDrive for Business on Wikipedia, you're redirected to the Sharepoint article.

This means that if you use OneDrive for Business, you won't be able to use the same username and password to log into a standard OneDrive account. The two services have different development histories and different ways of working.

In general use, OneDrive for Business looks and acts just like the consumer version, with integration into Office Online and the desktop Office apps available as part of Office 365. Teams can collaborate on documents, with OneDrive for Business keeping files up to date across computers that aren't necessarily all in the same building or connected to the same network, as long as they're online. If you can't connect to the internet, OneDrive for business will sync your documents as soon as you reestablish a connection.

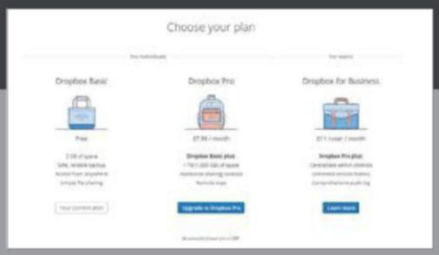
OneDrive for Business is a powerful aspect of the service, which comes with a monthly fee for every user, but offers 1TB of storage for each one.

RECYCLE BIN



If you've deleted something from OneDrive by mistake, head to www.onedrive.com and log in. On the left, near the bottom of the sidebar, you'll see a link to the Recycle Bin, which behaves much like the one on the Windows desktop. Find the file in the list and right-click it, then select 'Restore' from the menu that appears. Your file should now be back in your OneDrive folder.

GET FREE SPACE FROM MULTIPLE CLOUD SERVICES



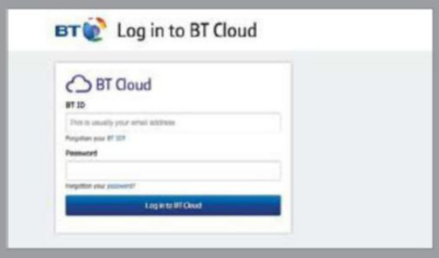
DROPBOX

Dropbox is a simple idea: a single folder on your PC that's synced through the cloud and appears the same on every computer you sign into it on. There's an app for most platforms – including mobile, where your files can be viewed and individually downloaded – but you only get 2GB of space for free. Upgrade options include 1TB of space for £7.99 a month.



GOOGLE DRIVE

Google's cloud service offers 15GB of storage space for free, and is tied in to the Google Docs online office suite that works very much like Office Online. Your storage space is shared across Drive, your Gmail inbox and Google+ photos. Upgrade options span from 100GB for £1.25 a month all the way to 30TB for £190 a month.



BT CLOUD

If you're a BT Broadband customers, BT Cloud is worth a look as it offers up to 50GB of free space, depending on your package, as a nice bonus on top of your monthly broadband payment. BT Cloud works through an app on desktop and mobile devices that lets you decide what it back up. Set it to watch your Documents folder, and anything that appears there is silently sent to the cloud.

APPS THAT WORK WITH ONEDRIVE

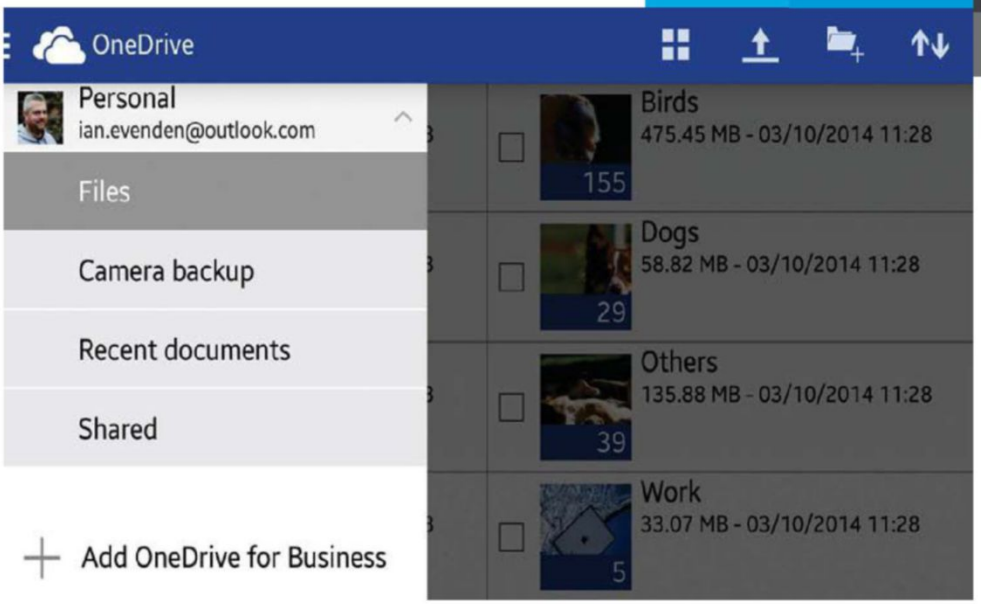
Gigabytes of cloud storage are no good unless you put them to use

OneDrive's integration with other apps is one of its most powerful features. These apps come in two guises: those that use OneDrive as a storage area, allowing your data to appear on every device running the same program, and those that add OneDrive functionality to devices that otherwise wouldn't have it.

To get OneDrive on your mobile device, head to the appropriate app store. For Apple devices that's the iTunes App Store, where you'll find a OneDrive app that's designed for use on both iPhones and iPads. For Android phones and tablets there's an app on Google Play, and Blackberry users will find one on Blackberry World. Windows Phone users can get it from Apps+Games if it's not installed already, and Xbox One gamers can install OneDrive on their consoles. There's even a plugin for the Chrome web browser you can install from the Web Store, but it seems to do little other than launch the OneDrive website.

The website is a useful way of accessing files if you can't install an app on the PC you're using, as you can still upload and download the files you need manually. In this way, OneDrive becomes like a remote USB flash drive, allowing you to copy files and take them to another computer – as long as you're connected to the internet.

The mobile apps work in a similar way. Because of the limited storage on mobile devices – 16GB isn't an uncommon capacity, and many don't have a microSD card slot to add more storage – syncing all your OneDrive files to them is impractical and could push up your phone bill if it's using your mobile data connection.



TEAMWORK OneDrive is an excellent counterpart to many other apps on both your Windows PC and mobile devices

Unlike their desktop counterparts, mobile OneDrive apps display the contents of your OneDrive folders without immediately downloading their contents. You can browse your files, choose the ones you need, then save them to your phone, but any changes you make to them will not be saved and synced to your other computers unless you re-upload the file to OneDrive.

OneDrive offers automatic camera roll uploading for mobiles, something it has in common with other cloud services such as Dropbox. This means that if you take a snap with your phone camera it will upload to the cloud, and appear on your desktop PC the next time you switch it on, without you having to connect the two devices and copy the file over manually.

Anyone reading the news recently will be aware of the 'leak' from Apple's iCloud of intimate photographs of celebrities. OneDrive has some of the toughest terms and conditions of any cloud service. Content placed in OneDrive is monitored by Microsoft, and anything that contravenes the service's code of conduct is subject to removal, and the account that placed it there can face being closed down.

Photos on OneDrive are scanned with Microsoft's PhotoDNA tool, also used by Google and Facebook, and subject matter that contravenes the code of conduct includes nudity, and anything related to the purchasing of guns. This means celebrities' nude selfies couldn't leak from OneDrive, as in theory Microsoft would have removed them long before.

The second type of app is aware of OneDrive, and will sync its data through it across devices without you needing to set it manually. There's a small but growing number of apps that support this functionality, including OneNote, which we discuss in greater depth below, 3D image visualisation app Cooliris and Genius Scan +, which uses your phone to scan documents and upload them to the cloud.

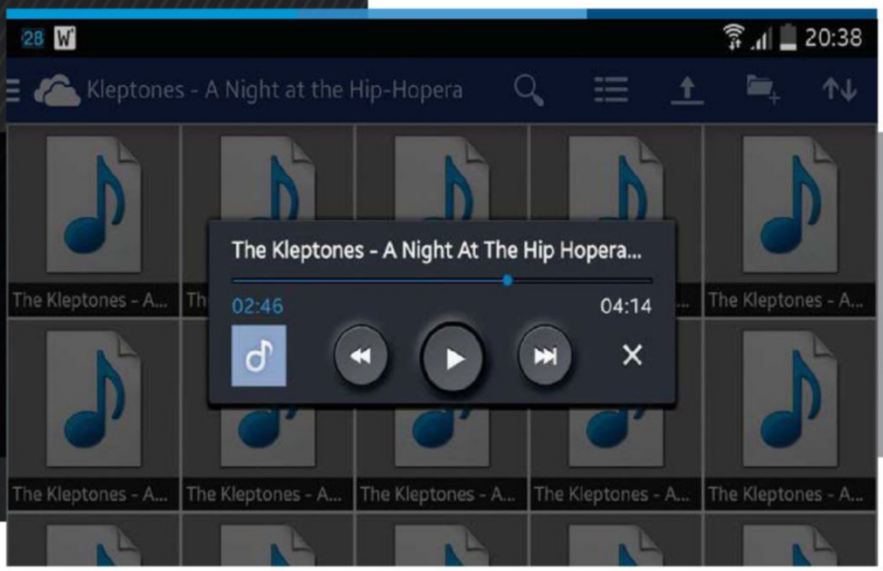
These apps often come with a desktop counterpart, so the OneDrive integration makes sense as you can view your work on a larger screen, and go on to share or even print your creation – perhaps incorporating it into a PowerPoint presentation that will, in turn, be saved back into OneDrive and shared with multiple recipients.

TAKE NOTE OF ONENOTE

OneNote is an interesting app first released by Microsoft 10 years ago, but recently made available for free on many different platforms. In essence it's a notebook, and indeed its saved files – placed in OneDrive – are referred to as such. It may look a little like a word processor, but OneNote allows you to save pictures, drawings and text anywhere you like on its pages. Just tap or click somewhere and start typing – or write with a stylus or finger.

OneNote comes into its own on tablet computers. Its functionality is built in to the Surface Pro 3, where clicking the Surface Pen will allow you to take a note even if the device has its screen locked. You can have it on your iPad and make a shopping list as you look through your kitchen cupboards that's then synced to your Android phone ready for reading back when you're at the supermarket. Or you can arrange pictures you've taken into the order you want, then view the arrangement on your desktop PC when you get home. Notebooks are also available in a web browser at www.onenote.com

It's a powerful and convenient way to take notes, especially with a touch interface, and the OneDrive syncing means you're never far away from your most recent to-do list.



LISTEN UP You can play music stored in your OneDrive account using the service's mobile apps

MEDIA STREAMING

Listen to music stored in your OneDrive account anywhere

While Microsoft, at the time of writing, has yet to announce a music streaming service that includes OneDrive, the functionality is there within its mobile apps.

If you upload your legally acquired MP3s to a folder on OneDrive, taking careful note of the recent changes to the UK's copyright laws, which came into effect in September, and then access the folder from one of SkyDrive's mobile apps, you'll find you can play the files from within the app on iOS, and using the built-in Sound Player app on Android.

Of course, Microsoft has a full streaming music service called Xbox Music that you should probably use instead, since it's free for the basic version. You can find out more about it on page 54 this issue.

You can also use the OneDrive website to play video files directly from your storage, as long as they're in the MP4, QuickTime movie (.mov) or Apple video (.m4v) format.

MOVE YOUR ONEDRIVE FOLDER

Make Microsoft's cloud storage work around you

The default location of your OneDrive folder is in C:/user/name/, but you can move it to a more convenient location – perhaps on a larger hard drive if you're running short of space.

In Windows 8 or before, right click 'OneDrive' icon in the notification area, select 'Settings' and click on 'Unlink OneDrive'. You'll go through the same setup procedure you did when you first installed the app, and will have to wait until your files download from the internet into their new location before it's finished.

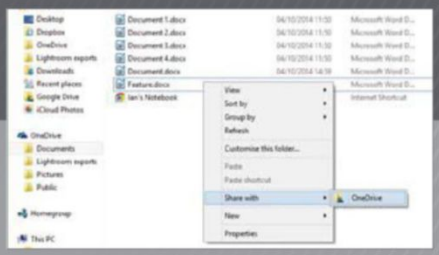
In Windows 8.1, the process is different. OneDrive is a part of the OS itself, so you can move the folder just as you would something like the Documents folder.

Right-click the OneDrive folder in the right-hand sidebar of an Explorer window, and select 'Properties'. From there click 'Location > Move'. Point the following window to the new location you want, and click 'OK'. The folder is then moved, without having to redownload the files. ■



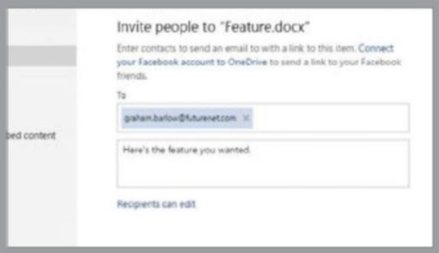
MOVE IT, MOVE IT You can keep your PC's OneDrive folder wherever you like

SHARE A DOCUMENT FROM ONEDRIVE



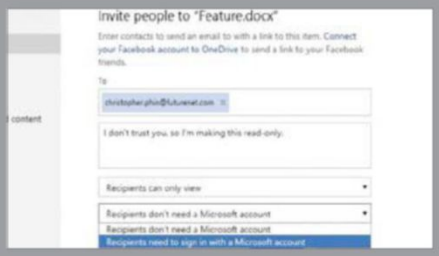
1 CHOOSE TO SHARE

You can share documents and folders directly from OneDrive in Windows 8.1, and allow recipients to either read or edit them. From the desktop, locate the document you want to share and right-click it, then select 'Share' and 'OneDrive' from the menu. Your web browser will open and load the OneDrive website, so you might need to log in.



2 ADD RECIPIENT

Once logged in, you'll get a screen like this one. If using an operating system older than Windows 8.1, you can share the file from the website and get to the same stage. Enter the email address of the recipient, and type a message in the box if you want. An email with the message and a link to the document will be sent to the recipient.



3 SET PERMISSIONS

There are a couple of further options on the webpage, accessed by clicking the blue 'Recipients can edit' link. Here, you can choose whether your recipient can edit the document or merely read it – editing is useful for collaborating with workmates, but not ideal in every situation. Last is a toggle for whether or not the viewer needs to log in with a Microsoft account.

Hands on with Windows 10

You can download the latest Windows 10 yourself, but before you do, find out what we think of it so far

By Mary Branscombe, Mayank Sharma, Dan Grabham and Graham Barlow



As a Windows user, we're hoping you've heard of Windows 10 by now. If not, then it's the next version of Windows; Microsoft is skipping Windows 9 entirely and going straight to 10. It announced Windows 10 in October and made a Technical Preview version available to download the next day. The Technical Preview of Windows 10 doesn't have every feature of the upcoming operating system, but Microsoft has revealed that over a million people are testing it anyway, and we're among them.

"It's been awesome to see so many of you joining the Windows Insider Program and letting us know what you think about the Windows 10 Technical Preview software," Microsoft's corporate vice president of operating systems Joe Belfiore wrote in a Windows blog post, celebrating the millionth download.

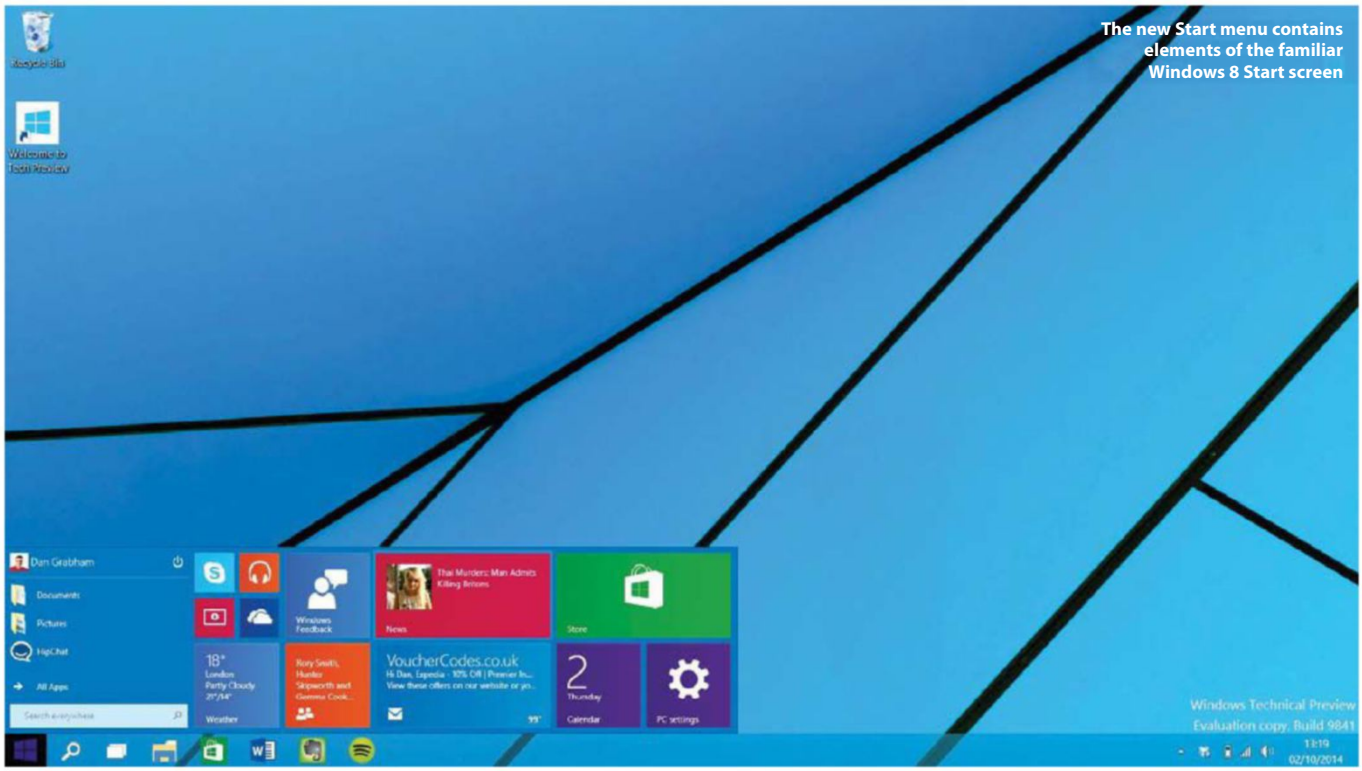
Here at *Windows Help & Advice* we've been getting stuck into the new operating system for a good few weeks now, and here we present our findings. You'll find out what Windows 10 is really like to use, what we like and what we don't.

To summarise, we think Windows 10 is going to be a hit. It's already won our hearts by combining the best bits of Windows 7 and 8, but perhaps the best news is that there's more to come. We expect some new features to be added before its final release around summer 2015, so look out for details of those in the pages of this magazine shortly.

In the meantime, let's take a closer look at what Windows 10 has in store for you…

"We expect some new features to be added before its final release in 2015"


Windows Technical Preview
Evaluation copy. Build 9841
13:19
02/10/2014
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The new Start menu contains elements of the familiar Windows 8 Start screen

Hands on with Windows 10

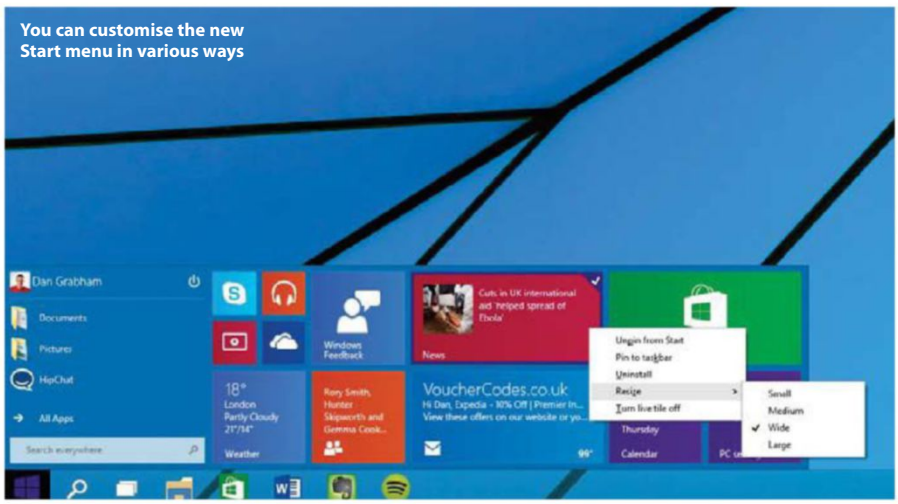
Microsoft tries to strike a balance for every kind of user

Yes, the Start menu is back. Yes, there are virtual desktops. No, the Charms bar hasn't gone away. And no, we don't know precisely when Windows 10 will be released or what it will cost. But we've seen the Technical Preview of the new operating system, and the word to bear in mind is 'productivity'.

This isn't the place to look for changes in Explorer or the Control Panel, let alone desktop tools like Paint and Notepad, or Store apps like Music and Video. The Technical Preview is about the core features that are supposed to prove Microsoft can balance touch, mouse and keyboard input without making any users feel abandoned.

Boot it up!

There are profound differences between Windows 8.1 and Windows 10, even in this early technical preview. For starters, the installation process has been streamlined. You can get through the entire process without creating a local account on your machine and instead authenticate via your existing Microsoft account. We also like the ability to setup and configure sync settings for Microsoft's OneDrive file hosting service from the installation itself.



You can customise the new Start menu in various ways

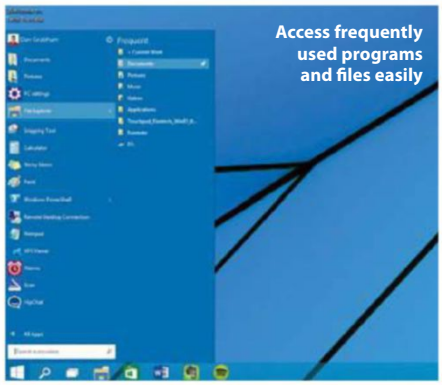
Unlike Windows 8/8.1, Windows 10 boots straight into a traditional looking desktop. This contains all the elements you'd expect, with icons on the desktop and a taskbar at the bottom and a fully functional Start menu. As expected, the Start menu is the default if you use Windows 10 with a keyboard and mouse, but you can keep the full-screen Start screen if you prefer it. Even on the Start menu, you can pin Live tiles in multiple sizes on the right, but on the left you also get the familiar list of pinned and recent apps, with jump lists for files, the search box (which you can also use to run typed commands), and a power button for shutting down or restarting your PC.

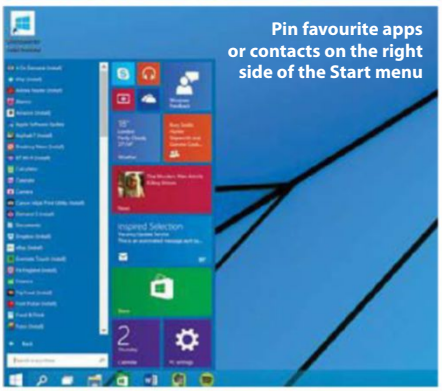
The search box has all the Windows 8 features, including results from Bing and the Windows store, and a separate Search menu next to the Start button gives you trending topics directly from Bing, too.

You can resize the Start menu, although you can only drag to change the height; changing the width means picking a separate setting. This is more familiar for mouse and keyboard users, but it remains to be seen whether Windows 8 users who like touch will find it a step backwards.

Snaps, apps and desktops

You can still use [Alt]+[Tab] to move between open windows. As in Windows 8.1, these now include any modern apps you have running, and those now open as





EARLY VERDICT

Windows 10 is all about balancing the demands of different people. It's not just business users with desktop PCs and keyboards versus tablet users. Windows is for sensors and data centres, phones, the Xbox One, tablets, laptops, desktop PCs, giant wall screens and everything in between. What we're seeing in this first Technical Preview release is very much about balancing the heritage of two decades on Windows with the new world of touch, and with making IT teams comfortable with the BYOD and consumer-focused features introduced in Windows 8 by giving them more security and management options.

At the preview event there wasn't a touchscreen in sight and we only got to use Windows 10 with a mouse and keyboard on a big screen that takes full advantage of the new ways of arranging windows and swapping between virtual desktops. The Technical Preview is designed to make power users happy, not change the world.

windows on the desktop like any other software you're running, ready to be resized or snapped side-by-side. The new Task View button on the Taskbar is there to introduce the idea of moving between windows to the many Windows users who have never tried [Alt]+[Tab].

There are many more ways to snap windows than there were in Windows 8. If you have a narrow window, the second one can take up all the rest of the space, or you can snap four apps, one in each corner. Windows even shows thumbnails of open windows to help you pick one to snap without rearranging everything.

The [Windows]+[Tab] keyboard shortcut now gives you a view that's the same as [Alt]+[Tab], except for a button at the bottom for adding virtual desktops, and the list of desktops you already have open. You can use your mouse to pick the set of windows you want to put on screen, and the window you want to start using.

Virtual desktops aren't new, but they never graduated from a utility to a main Windows feature because they can be confusing to manage. There's a subtle clue in the Taskbar to help you; if an app is open but not in the current desktop, it is underlined rather than outlined, and if you click on its icon you go straight to it and the rest of that desktop. It remains to be seen whether that's enough to avoid confusion, but it certainly signals that Microsoft has power users in mind.

Works like a charm

Despite rumours, the Charms bar hasn't gone away, but you might not see it when you use the [Windows]+[C] shortcut. If you have a mouse and keyboard and the window that's active is a modern app like the Windows Store, that shortcut brings up a mini Charms menu hanging off the top left corner of the app instead.

This has the three dots that give you any relevant extra commands (labelled as App Commands). These include the Search, Share and Settings charms that are usually on the Charms bar, other useful commands like Play, Print and Project, plus the option of running the app full screen. If you can't print from the app, the Print charm on the menu is greyed out.

That makes the Charms less touch-friendly, but much more mouse-friendly when you're controlling an app. That's exactly what users without touchscreens want; moving all the way over to the side of the screen and all the way back isn't efficient with a mouse. When you're controlling Windows – which is what you get when you don't have a modern app selected – having the Charms and settings bar at the side of the screen is fairly logical. And those Charms are staying around (although probably in a different arrangement with a more logical division of what shows up where) because when the Windows team took tried taking them out, users at Microsoft complained loudly. That big, friendly sidebar for choosing and changing Wi-Fi options turned out to be really handy and surprisingly popular.

This is the Windows 10 experience in microcosm. Microsoft is trying to keep the bits of the modern interface that people like and find useful, but not have them be annoying and intrusive when mouse users are getting things done.



The user icon at the top of the Start menu makes it easy to lock your PC or sign out of Windows

The command prompt

At the other extreme from Charms is the command prompt, where you go to run scripts and batch files. In recent years the emphasis has been on the far more powerful PowerShell automation system, but in the spirit of 'no feature left behind', the humble command line is getting the same harmonisation as the rest of Windows 10. You can finally use keyboard shortcuts to select a line or a word at a time, and to copy and paste text.

Only a tiny fraction of Windows users may ever use the command line, but Microsoft wants them to be happy as well, and this is the kind of modernisation that's a decade overdue.

New tools

Some of the most interesting features for business aren't visible in the Technical Preview. These include the ability to upgrade PCs using management tools, and manage them through the same Mobile Device Management systems used for smartphones and tablets. There will also be an enterprise app store that lets businesses manage volume licences for modern apps instead of making users sign in to a work PC with a personal Microsoft account, and separation of personal and business data using encrypted containers. These features will appeal to businesses, but they can't try them out until the previews of Windows Server and the necessary management tools come along.

Integrated Internet Explorer

The preview of Windows 10 only includes a desktop version of Internet Explorer, and it's not a new one; future updates to the web browser are coming out on their own schedule. That doesn't necessarily mean the immersive version of Internet Explorer is going away, but it doesn't make sense to have a separate, full-screen browser when all the modern apps are now just windows on the desktop.

We don't know what changes there will be to the IE interface, and the Windows team hasn't yet decided how to handle the different modes of the browser. Having a plugin-free version of the browser is definitely a real security advantage, but unless it's immediately obvious how to switch between them people will get annoyed and confused. Getting challenges like this right without abandoning the benefits of Windows 8 is where Windows 10 will succeed or fail.



The Start menu makes a welcome return in Windows 10

A closer look at the Windows 10 Start menu

The Start menu has been given a Live tile makeover, and you can now pin whatever you want to the panel on the right. So, just like on Windows Phone, you can pin a favourite contact or app for easy access. Live tiles are dynamic, so they can show the latest news for your current location for example. You could also pin a folder you use regularly; it's up to you.

The left-hand side of the Start menu works like the old Windows 7 one, so you can search for whatever you want and launch it using the [Enter] key on your keyboard. You can see recently accessed programs and browse through other programs too, via an All Apps menu.

The All Apps option now features a vertical scrollbar, so there's no stacking of multiple menus. As with Windows 7 and 8, however, the best way to find anything is to search rather than browse for it.

By restoring the Start menu, Microsoft is acknowledging that Windows 8 went too far for some users, especially in the corporate space. But those Modern UI apps (now referred to as Universal apps) still provide the link with touchscreens.

New layout

The top of the Start menu contains your account icon, so you can lock your PC, change your account picture or sign out. Another power button enables you to sleep, shut down or restart your PC.

A panel underneath provides access to your files, as well as shortcuts to your Libraries. An arrow beside the File Explorer icon in the Start menu shows your most recently accessed folders for quick access.

As in Windows 8.1 you can right-click on the Start button to get a 'power menu' with quick access to the Control Panel and other advanced features such as Run, Disk Management and the Task Manager.

One big change is that you can now resize the menu. This doesn't work that well at the moment, as you can only make it flatter (more of a horizontal bar) or taller. You can't freely resize it to form a smaller version of the now-old Start screen.

Right-clicking an item in the Start menu brings up other options, such as pinning it to the Taskbar, removing it from the menu or, if appropriate, removing it from your PC. As with the Windows 8 Start screen, you can drag tiles to rearrange them.

You can also turn off individual Live tiles and change their size. Small, Medium, Wide and Large are the sizes available.

Right-clicking a blank space in the menu gives you two other options: 'Personalize' and 'Properties'. The first of these is currently about as useful as a chocolate teapot – it just takes you to a subset of the Control Panel that gives you a few colour options to choose from.

Selecting 'Properties' takes you to the Taskbar and Start menu Properties app in Control Panel. Strangely, you're sent to the Taskbar tab by default. Clicking on the 'Start menu' tab shows you a few options, the top of which is a box labelled 'Use the Start menu instead of the Start screen'.

Some other options concern privacy for shared user accounts – you can clear the personal information from your Live tiles, as well as options to choose not to 'store and display' recently opened programs in the Start menu.

Deep customisation

A 'Customize' option provides more granular control over what is shown in the Start menu as well as behavioural characteristics such as whether sub-menus open automatically when you hover over them, or whether dragging and dropping is allowed (both of these are permitted by default).

You can also choose to show system administrative tools in the menu, plus the Control Panel, This PC (formerly known as My Computer), your personal user folder or your music and video folders should you wish. It's all very customisable.

Whatever you think of the new Start menu, one thing is for sure – it makes Microsoft's insistence on not even having a Start button in Windows 8 seem ridiculous. Just think about it; Microsoft missed out the button's raison d'être for a whole version.

INSTALLING THE WINDOWS 10 TECHNICAL PREVIEW? HERE ARE 12 ESSENTIAL THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Windows 10 Technical Preview is here. Despite Microsoft calling it a 'moving target', you can install and use it (at your own risk), and many of its features do work well. Here's your guide to installing the Technical Preview and using it safely. Expect to see it evolve over time, as Microsoft has promised regular updates.

1 It's for experts
Don't install it if you don't know what an ISO file is, or you don't have a separate PC to install it on. Microsoft is stressing that without that knowledge, you won't get on very well. This is extreme pre-release software. It will have bugs in it. It will probably crash. It might change. Things might not work. In short, don't depend on it!

2 You need to prepare
As well as that second PC, you need to do a few things in preparation. The main one is to back up any data stored on the hard drive. If you are intending to install it on a PC you use regularly, you might like to think again. If you didn't use Windows 8.1, there might be issues with compatibility, so check the Compatibility Center first (http://bit.ly/1oRG4dz).

3 You need to sign up
Once you've done that, you'll need to sign up for the Windows Insider Program (https://insider.windows.com). Specifically, you need to agree to the terms and conditions that don't hold Microsoft responsible if you're silly enough to install it on a PC that contains important files that you haven't backed up. Your Windows 10 install will receive regular updates, and there's a chance your data might be lost.

4 The download is around 4GB
The ISO files for Windows 10 are around 4GB, but the exact size depends on which version you download – there are 32- and 64-bit versions of several different language versions. The Windows 10 key is NKJFK-GPHP7-G8C3J-P6JXR-HQRJR. If you want an enterprise version, head to http://bit.ly/1qiL9eG to download Windows 10 Technical Preview for Enterprise.

You will need a DVD or USB drive large enough to hold a 4GB ISO file, and to download one of the Windows 10 ISO files if you're installing it on a clean PC. We recommend a tool like Rufus (http://rufus.akeo.ie) or ImgBurn (www.imgburn.com) to copy the ISO.

5 It has a limited shelf life
Your Windows 10 installation will stop working on 15 April 2015. Windows 10 almost certainly won't be released then, but we may well see a beta of the OS to replace your Technical Preview install. Microsoft will remind users to upgrade after April 1 2015.

6 You can install it directly on a Windows 8.1 PC
If you're installing it from Windows 8.1 you can simply mount the ISO and execute setup.exe. If you're installing it from an older version, you can run setup.exe from the USB drive you created from the ISO. Double-tap or double-click 'setup.exe', then follow the steps.

7 You can keep your files (probably)
If you're upgrading from Windows 8.1 or Windows 8 you can keep Windows settings, personal files, and most apps. If you're upgrading from Windows 7 you can keep Windows settings, personal files, and most apps. If you previously ran Windows Vista you must perform a clean install and can keep *nothing*. Sorry, Microsoft doesn't like Vista any more.

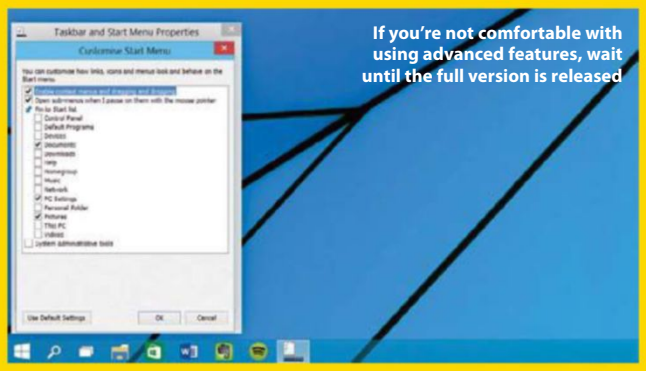
8 You don't need a very powerful PC
If your PC can run Windows 8.1, it can also run Windows 10 Technical Preview. You need a 1GHz or faster processor with 1GB of memory for 32-bit, or 2GB for 64-bit. You'll also need at least 16GB of free hard drive space. The Technical Preview won't work on Windows RT 8.1 and Windows N editions.

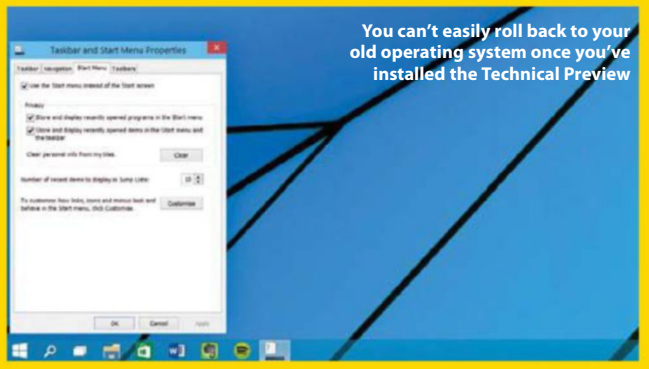
9 There are limited features for touch
The Technical Preview works with touch, but "some things will be rough and unfinished" says Microsoft. The corporation is working on improvements for the OS to work with touch.

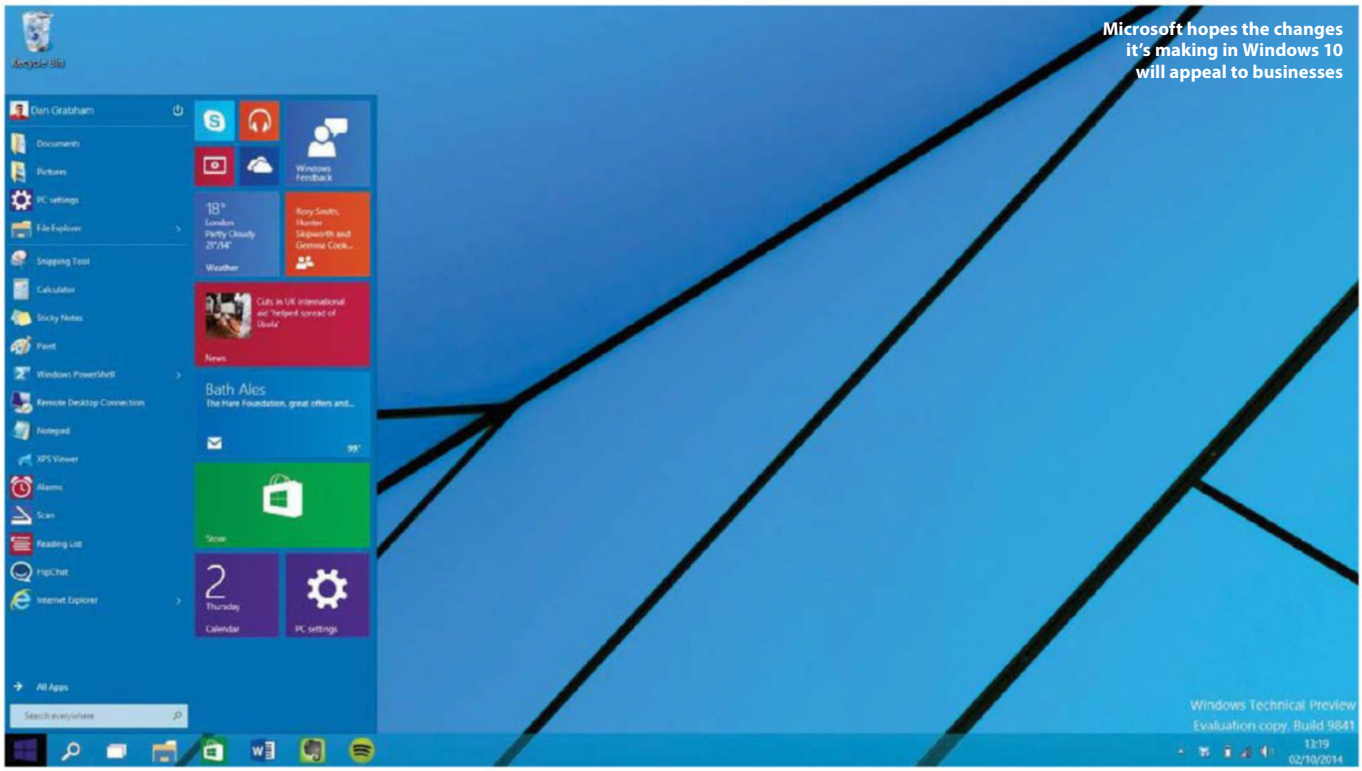
10 You'll need to reinstall any language packs you use
If you're running Windows 8.1, Windows 8, or Windows 7 and have installed a language pack or a they'll be removed when you install Technical Preview. You'll see a message telling you to re-add them.

11 You can't go back
You won't be able to use your recovery partition to downgrade from Windows 10 to Windows 8.1 or similar. If you have a recovery partition on your system, it will no longer be able to restore your computer to the version of Windows you had before. And, as you'd expect from a system with no recovery partition, you'll need to install a previous version of Windows from a DVD or USB drive when it comes to overwriting or wiping your Windows 10 install.

12 Using a virtual machine could be the safest way to try it
You can use something like VirtualBox (www.virtualbox.org) to install Windows 10 as a virtual machine. Simply click the 'New' button in the main window to create a new machine, then give it a name (you'll need to choose the 'Windows 8.'1 option). When finished, go to 'Storage' in the left sidebar, and next to Controller: IDE, select the 'Add CD' button. Click or tap 'Choose disk' and select the Windows 10 ISO. And there you have it – Windows 10 in a virtual machine.


If you're not comfortable with using advanced features, wait until the full version is released


You can't easily roll back to your old operating system once you've installed the Technical Preview



Microsoft hopes the changes it's making in Windows 10 will appeal to businesses

A new beginning

Microsoft needs to persuade everyone it's time to upgrade

During Microsoft's Windows 10 launch event, one thing became clear: it is desperate to banish the dual-interface confusion that Windows 8 created. However, with the move to a more unified interface, we can't help but feel like Microsoft is turning a little against touch with this release. Could Microsoft yet reveal a tablet version of Windows Phone 10? It's possible, but looks unlikely.

As Microsoft's Terry Myerson says: "Windows 10 will run across an incredibly broad set of devices – from the Internet of Things, to servers in enterprise data centres worldwide. Some of these devices have 4-inch screens, some have 80-inch screens, and some don't have screens at all. Some of these devices you hold in your hand, others are 10 feet away. Some of these devices you primarily use touch/pen, others mouse/keyboard, others controller/gesture – and some devices can switch between input types."

Continuum is key

That's why the new Continuum feature is key to the success of Windows 10 – the operating system's ability to adapt its interface depending on the type of input and display it's attached to. It's a very Apple-style feature in name and function, and should bridge the gaps between the diverse community of Windows devices.

As we've said, Microsoft is trying to strike a balance for every kind of user with Windows 10. And that includes business and enterprise. The preview event was designed specifically to signpost Windows 10 for these types of users, some of whom are persevering with the non-supported Windows XP while others wonder where they will go after Windows 7.

There were some interesting developments for those users, especially around device management and the ability to customise enterprise app stores and ensure that personal and corporate data don't mix. But the event didn't go that heavy on the detail so enterprises will certainly need to check out Windows 10 and its associated tools themselves.

One important benefit is that businesses will be able to choose between Windows Group Policy and Mobile Device Management (MDM) for the management and deployment of all Windows devices. That includes the management of what users do with their data, which is great news as the bring your own device (BYOD) culture spreading throughout businesses is leaking data left, right and centre.

Apps for all

Developers have a lot to celebrate with Windows 10's Universal apps. There will be one app store across all devices including mobile and Xbox and apps will run on all sizes of device and in all environments. Apps will update across all devices and be simpler to administrate.

Right now, Windows 10 doesn't feel particularly different to Windows 8.1 for consumers. Yes, the new Start Menu should assuage some users coming from Windows XP and Windows 7, but there is precious little polish in the Technical Preview build. That's okay – Microsoft has two thirds of a year to add all that in.

Microsoft cites 14 per cent growth in shipments of enterprise PCs during the first half of 2014 alongside a rise in enterprise tablet shipments of 33 per cent, and those are the users Microsoft desperately wants to target with this new OS as it endeavours to persuade them away from older products. Microsoft is not only offering a Technical Preview of the OS itself, but is also releasing Technical Previews of Windows Server and its management tools, too.

So does Windows 10 mean the operating system is getting back on track? Probably. But Microsoft has a big challenge in persuading people that it is serious about Windows 10 as a corporate tool as well as something that consumers should want to upgrade to, whether they're converts to Windows 8 or they resolutely stuck with Windows 7.

And that's before you mention the millions of people still persevering with Windows XP – the operating system that simply won't die. Truth be told, Microsoft still needs to bridge the gap back to all those people, too. ■

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Do you have a PC problem? Get in touch…

Email full details of your problem to the support team and we'll do our best to help **windowsmagazine@futurenet.com**

Data recovery

CAN'T ACCESS DATA ON EXTERNAL DRIVE

Q My Samsung D3 Station 3TB hard drive suddenly stopped working recently, and is now refusing to power up, never mind show up in Windows. Unfortunately, I've got a lot of important data on there that I need to recover. Can you tell me how to get it back?
Graeme Porter



Graham's solution

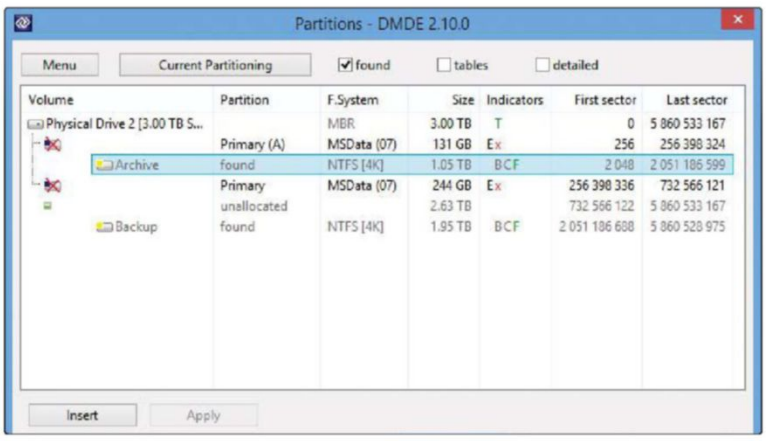
Returning the drive to Samsung won't get your data back, but if you can manage to open the enclosure (see www.bit.ly/d3-disassemble for a guide) without voiding your warranty, you'll probably find that it's only the enclosure that's failed, not the actual drive.

First, you need to connect the drive back to your PC. If you have the space and spare SATA data and power cables, you could connect it internally. Alternatively, you could try a device like the Plugable USB3-SATA Docking Station (around £28/$24 from Amazon). Hook this up and your drive should be visible in Windows again.

However, although you can now see the drive on your PC, you won't be able to access it. Windows won't let you open any partitions, and they will appear to be much smaller than they actually are. That's because of the way drives larger than 2.2TB are set up to be visible to older versions of Windows.

From here, however, recovering data from the drive is mercifully simple. First, download and run DMDE Free Edition from www.dmde.com. Select your physical drive from the list of Physical Devices and click 'OK'. After the software performs a short partition scan, you should see your missing drive or partitions greyed out and listed with the F.System NTFS (4K). Select one and click 'Open volume'.

The free version of DMDE allows you to recover individual files by



PARTITION RECOVERY
Try DMDE if your partitions become inaccessible

FIND THE SOLUTION! ***Outlook & Exchange Solutions Centre***
If you have a problem with Outlook or want useful tips and advice, you'll find everything you need at www.slipstick.com.



PUP PROTECTION
Malwarebytes Anti-Malware Premium blocks PUPs at source

Quickfire questions

How can I stop viewing someone's annoying retweets in my Twitter timeline?
Wendy Harris

Go the user's profile page on Twitter (www.twitter.com/username, where 'username' is their Twitter @name). Click the 'Settings' button next to the 'Following' button and choose 'Turn off retweets'.

I've installed Classic Start in Windows 8.1, but can no longer access the Quick Access menu via the Start button.
Clive Ranger

The simplest way to continue accessing the Quick Access menu when needed is by pressing [Win]+[X].

browsing to them in the main pane, then selecting them and right-clicking 'Recover files' to save them to a location on another drive. This is fine if you only have a relatively small number of files to recover, but if you want to recover the entire drive quickly, we'd recommend upgrading to the Express version (€16, or around £14/$20) once you've verified that the program has found your data.

Security
CAN MALWAREBYTES RUN ALONGSIDE OTHER SECURITY TOOLS?

Q I'm tempted by one of the rapidly disappearing lifetime license offers for Malwarebytes Anti-Malware (MBAM) Premium. Does this provide anything extra over the free version other than real-time protection, and is it safe to run Malwarebytes alongside BitDefender Internet Security, which I also have installed?
Simon Jethwa

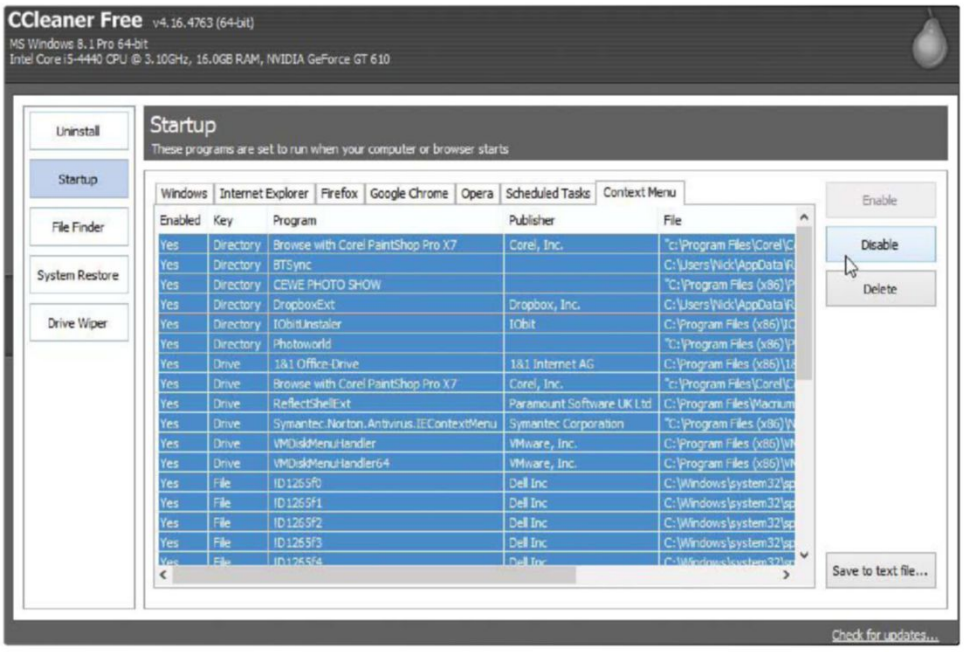


Nick's solution
It should be perfectly safe to install the Premium version of Malwarebytes alongside another security product – MBAM has been deliberately engineered to co-exist peacefully with other anti-malware tools. The program provides you with a secondary layer of defence against malware – particularly potentially unwanted programs (PUPs), which most other security tools ignore because, despite being annoying, they don't pose a direct threat to your PC. The Premium version also blocks hacking and phishing attempts and automatic scans, just like other tools. The lifetime license has now been discontinued, but can still be purchased if you look hard enough – otherwise a year's subscription protecting three PCs costs $24.95 (about £15.50) from www.malwarebytes.org.

Windows
RIGHT-CLICK MENU KEEPS VANISHING

Q When I right-click in Windows Explorer, I often find the context menu vanishes before I've got a chance to click the option I want. How do I stop this?
Robert Lyle

CONTEXT MANAGEMENT
Manage entries in the right-click menu via CCleaner



"Malwarebytes has been engineered to co-exist with other tools"

Jargon buster!

Quick Access menu
A cut-down version of the Windows Start menu found in Windows 8, which contains a number of system shortcuts.

Retweet
A Tweet that has been reposted by another Twitter user, for the purpose of sharing with their own followers.

Quickfire questions

Every time I try to uninstall Google Chrome I get a 'Problem with Windows Installer Package' error. Can you help me solve it, please?
Bruce Alexander

This could be linked to a more deep-seated problem with Windows Installer itself – visit http://support.microsoft.com/kb/290301 and run the Program Install and Uninstall Troubleshooter to resolve it.

I've accidentally set up a duplicate Facebook Group. How do I remove it?
Jules Derbyshire

You need to remove every single person you've invited to the group manually using the group's settings button (click 'Edit settings'). Once everyone else has been removed, remove yourself and the group will be gone.

Is there a quick way to make all my OneDrive files available offline in Windows 8.1?
Vince Stevenson

Right-click the OneDrive Taskbar Notification Area icon and select 'Settings'. Make sure you have enough free space for the operation, then tick "Make all files available even when this PC isn't connected to the internet" and click 'OK'.



Matt's solution

This particular problem is usually caused by a third-party program that has added a shell extension to the context menu, which causes the menu to crash whenever it's opened. Make a note of where the problem occurs – it may only occur when you right-click a specific type of file or folder, for example, which may help you identify the culprit.

You can manage your context menu items from within CCleaner, which you'll find on your free disc. Select 'Tools > Startup > Context Menu' to view all third-party entries. If you don't know which entry is the culprit, press [Ctrl]+[A] and choose 'Disable', then see if the problem is fixed. If it is, re-enable entries one at a time until you find the troublesome plugin, then troubleshoot the problem at the program's website, or simply leave the extension disabled.

Media

WINDOWS MEDIA CENTER GLITCH

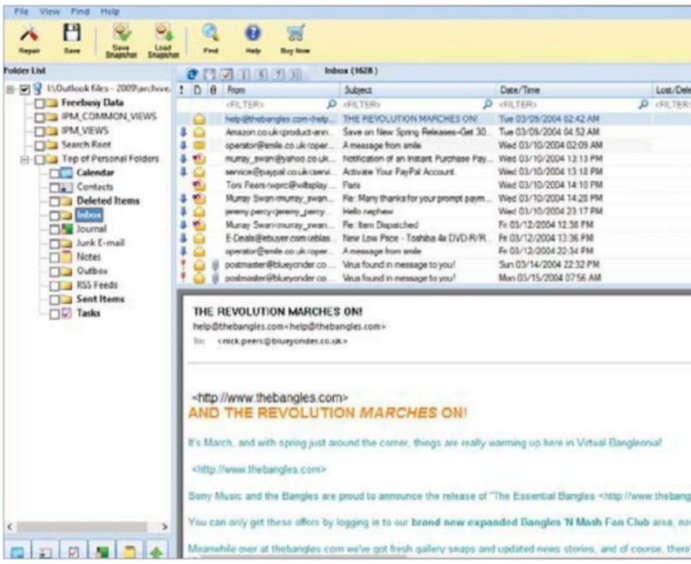
Q My self-built Asus PC is running Windows 8.1 with Media Center, and I'm currently plagued by two problems. First, upon launching, Media Center often freezes before continuing after a few minutes. This problem occurs even after refreshing and reinstalling Windows a number of times. Also, the mouse pointer disappears when Media Center is run. Can you help?
Robert Peters



Adam's solution

Tackling the second problem first, it sounds to me like Windows Media Center is running in full-screen mode. To resolve this problem, try pressing the [Esc] key to bring the cursor back, or run Media Center in windowed mode instead. Also verify that the Mouse Trails feature is disabled by going to the Pointer Options tab in the Mouse Control Panel.

Sadly Robert didn't reply to our email, so we can only offer general advice to anyone experiencing the first problem. A cause and solution may present themselves via your Event logs, or you might be better served switching to a different solution. NextPVR (www.nextpvr.com) is available to download free and offers similar functionality to Windows Media Center, including the ability to record television programmes via a tuner.



PST RECOVERY
Kernel for PST Repair is one of the cheaper recovery options out there

Outlook

OUTLOOK PST FILE ERROR FIX

Q Every time I try to open Microsoft Outlook I get an error telling me the PST file can't be opened and it closes. What can I do to recover my data?
Faye Dawlish

OPTIMISE THE REGISTRY SAFELY

Q Is there a safe way to optimise the Windows Registry without the nasty side-effects?
Phil Green



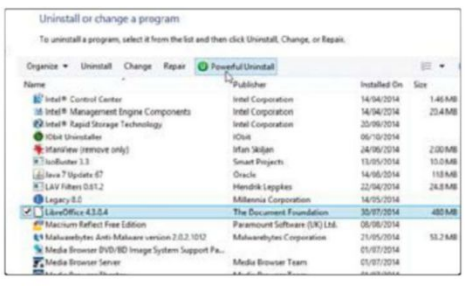
Graham's solution

I always recommend avoiding dedicated Registry cleaning tools because their approach is too random and unpredictable. Instead, adopt a DIY approach to cleaning out and optimising your Registry for genuine performance improvements without the potential pitfalls.



1 Manage programs efficiently

Most leftover Registry entries can be traced to programs you've removed in the past. If you're looking for a tool that can detect and offer to remove leftover entries after you uninstall a program, try IObit's free Uninstaller 4 – on the cover disc.



2 Choose 'Powerful Uninstall'

Once installed, IObit Uninstaller can be started from the Programs and Features Control Panel or its own user interface. If you choose the former, select the program you want to remove and click the 'Powerful Uninstall' button.



Graham's solution

The first port of call is Outlook's own ScanPST tool, which you'll find in the Microsoft Office\OFFICE14 folder if you're running Office 2010. Double-click 'Scanpst.exe' and follow the prompts to scan your files and repair them. Be prepared to run the tool a number of times before an error-free file is produced.

Faye ran the tool as requested, but Outlook still wouldn't open it. Fearing she might need to invest in data-recovery software, we pointed Faye to the free demo of Kernel for Outlook PST Repair at www.nucleustechnologies.com. On installing and running this she reported that the file was completely intact, with all her data visible. Purchasing the software costs around £38/$60, but we were suspicious because the file was reported clean, but Outlook still wouldn't open it.

Next, Faye attempted a repair install of Office 2010 via the Program and Features Control Panel (click 'Change > Repair'), but while Outlook initially opened the PST file after completing the repair, it then reverted back to the same error message.

Our final throw of the dice was to instruct Faye to rename the PST file and then use the Mail Control Panel's 'Data Files' button to add the new file, make it the default and then delete the original file. After doing this, Outlook opened again and this time worked correctly going forward.

Software

SLUGGISH BITTORRENT SYNC

Q Why does BitTorrent Sync take such a long time to detect changes to files on my devices? I often have to wait 15 minutes before it starts syncing changes made on one device to another. Can you help?

Lee Parker



Nick's solution

This is probably related to the default time interval of 10 minutes that BitTorrent Sync uses to check for changes to monitored folders. You can edit this figure on all of your computers running BitTorrent Sync by clicking 'Settings > Preferences' on each one separately. Switch to the Advanced tab and click 'More options'. Check the folder_rescan_interval setting, which is set to 600 seconds (10 minutes) by default. Change this figure to 60 (one minute) and click 'Set'. This should hopefully trigger faster updates.

Security

STOP BOTHERING ME, AVAST!

Q I recently tried to install Avast! Antivirus with no success, but now I keep getting little Avast! reminders popping up. I can remove them easily enough, but how can I stop them permanently?

Derek Green



Matt's solution

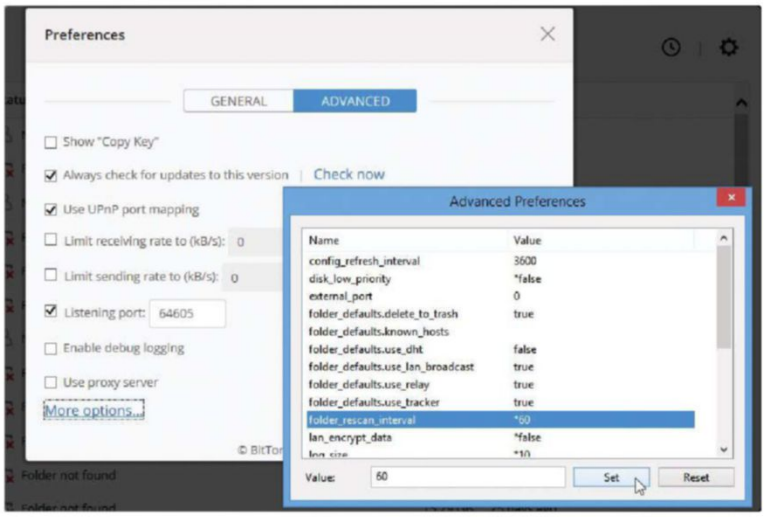
This can be linked to files left behind by the aborted Avast! install process. Any security tool worth its salt should offer a manual removal tool, which allows you to clear out all traces of the program, including leftover elements from a failed install. Go to www.avast.com/uninstall-utility to download the Avast! removal tool. ■



Do you have a PC problem? Get in touch…

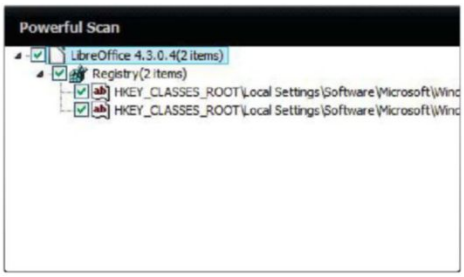
Email full details of your problem to the support team and we'll do our best to help: **windowsmagazine@futurenet.com**

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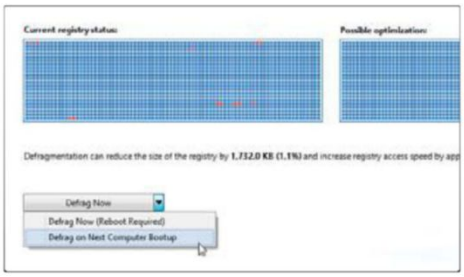
SLOW SYNC
Change this figure if BitTorrent Sync is slow to notice file changes

> "Any security tool worth its salt should offer a manual removal tool that allows you to clear out all traces of the program"



3 Dump leftover Registry entries

The quick install removes the program using its own uninstaller. After that, you can choose to perform a Powerful Uninstall to search for any leftovers. Review and select all the Registry entries and click 'Delete' followed by 'Yes' to remove them.



4 Compact and defrag

Deleting Registry entries won't speed up your PC on its own, so install Auslogics Registry Defrag from the cover disc and click 'Analyze'. Once the results are in, click 'Defrag on next computer bootup' to optimise your head drive next time your PC starts up.

Jargon buster!

PST file
This stands for personal storage table, and is the default file format for storing messages, contacts, calendar events and other items in Microsoft Outlook.

Registry
A database stored in several files (known as 'hives') that contains configuration settings and options for programs installed on your PC, as well as for Windows itself.

Upgrade

NEW HARDWARE ▶ ESSENTIAL ACCESSORIES ▶ LATEST GAMES

Welcome



The days of your computer being a grey box on your desk are long gone. You can now take your PC with you everywhere you go, ready for whenever you want to type out a report or relax and have fun.

This month we've been putting the latest version of Microsoft's productivity suite through its paces. Microsoft Office 365 is an easy and cost-effective way to access essentials like Word, Excel and PowerPoint. We've also put five of the latest Bluetooth speakers through their paces, and tested two of the best new laptops. Whatever you need a PC for, there's something here for you.

Nick Odantzis deputy editor
nick.odantzis@futurenet.com

This issue's highlights



80 Mini test: Bluetooth speakers
Enjoy the Christmas classics anywhere in your home with wireless speakers that connect to your PC, laptop or phone.



86 Lenovo ThinkPad W540
A top-notch high-resolution worktop, with a price tag to match. A brilliant performer, but only if you can justify the expense.



82 Acer Aspire S3
Sleek Ultrabook styling and dedicated gaming hardware combine to make a laptop that's ideal for both work and play.



88 The Sims 4
The latest installment in the hugely popular people-simulator features new emotional motivations, improved graphics and more.

Our review guarantee

We use only acknowledged experts to review products, so you can use our ratings with full confidence to make your buying decision

How we review

One of the key tenets of our review philosophy is that hardware should be compared against like products wherever possible. It is only when you pit the finest products of a certain type against one another – at the same time – that you can really come up with a definitive verdict as to which is the very best in that category. The pace of development in computer hardware means that it is very difficult to compare scores from today with those from, say, six months ago. Magazines and websites that review a new product on its own run the risk of confusing or misleading.

We guarantee to test every piece of hardware rigorously and thoroughly, using only acknowledged experts to establish the worth of a product. We always review from the viewpoint of our readers; the day-to-day practicality and quality of a product is paramount.

Our awards...

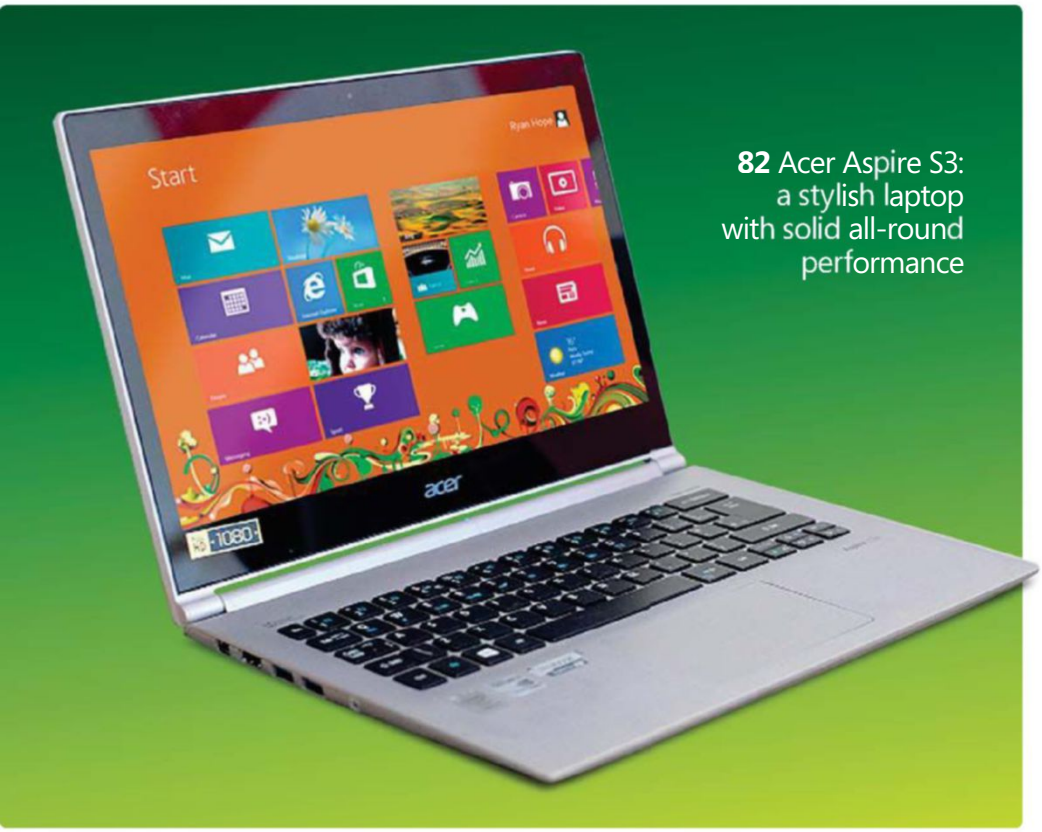


Only the very finest products receive our Best On Test Award. These will have excellent marks for quality.



Our Best Value Award is given to products that quite simply represent the best value for your money.

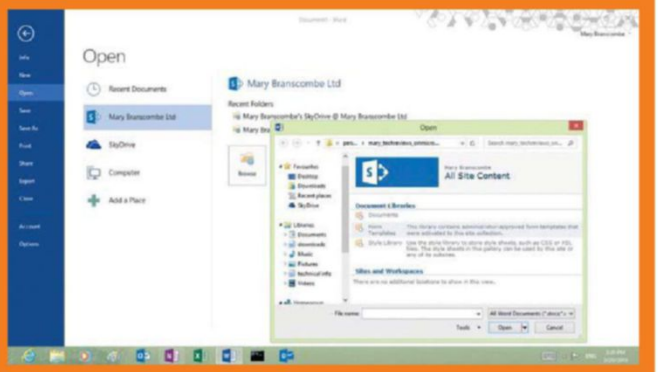
RATING EXPLAINED ★★★★★ Superb ★★★★☆ Very good ★★★☆☆ Good ★★☆☆☆ Disappointing ★☆☆☆☆ Poor



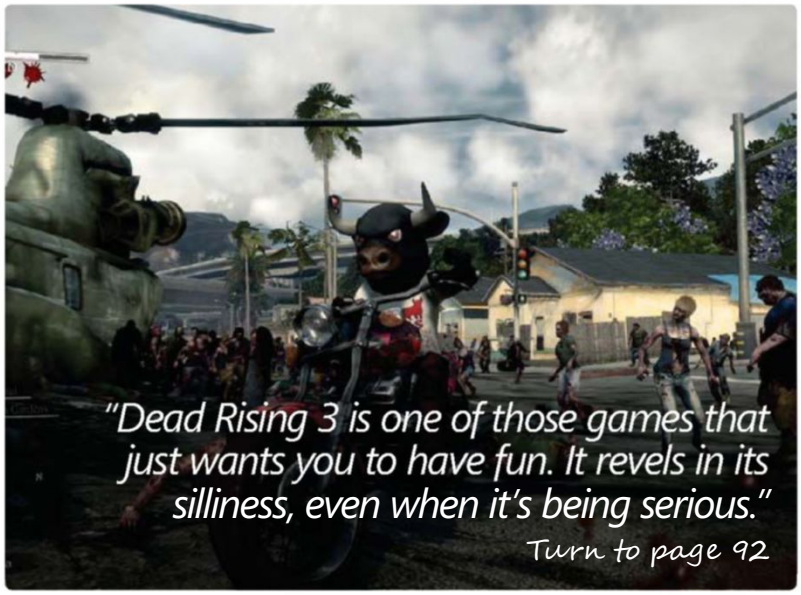
82 Acer Aspire S3: a stylish laptop with solid all-round performance

Full listing

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84 Microsoft Office 365: productivity enters the cloud



"Dead Rising 3 is one of those games that just wants you to have fun. It revels in its silliness, even when it's being serious."

Turn to page 92

Our promise to you...

The Upgrade section is your key to finding out about the latest products, all designed to help you get more from your PC

You can trust our reviews

Our expert reviewers are 100 per cent independent, with years of experience in the world of computing. Our rigorous testing procedures mean that only genuine, high-quality products are awarded high star ratings. Further, very few are handed our Best Value or Best on Test Awards. If you see an item of hardware bearing one of these marks, you can be confident that it is an excellent product. Always check when the award was given, to ensure it is still up-to-date.

We choose the best products

Thousands of new products for your computer are released every year and choosing between them can sometimes be an impossible task. Our experts select only the best hardware and software to feature in this magazine, making your decision on which one to choose easier. Even better, our awards and star rating system make it simple to find the best products for your needs, with our recommended products section giving you a fast, trustworthy guide to a wide range of hardware and software.

We'll introduce you to new stuff

Wherever we can, we review new hardware comparatively, pitching it head-to-head against other similar products. (Full details of our policy can be found in the opposite page, under 'Our review guarantee'.) Of course, this isn't always possible with new products and part of our duty to you is to introduce you a wide range of fascinating new hardware, software, services and games.

The reviews of standalone hardware and software are just as thorough as our comparative reviews. However, we do not allocate scores to them because this can often be misleading. The only exception to this rule is on our games reviews, where the pace of change is a lot slower and single scores can be genuinely useful.

SINGING THE BLUES

Take the weight off your phone's speakers with this latest batch of party-ready Bluetooth sonic projectors



High-end Bluetooth speakers have surged in popularity over recent months, and you're now spoilt for choice when it comes to choosing a battery-powered, wireless sound system to use with your phone, PC or laptop. With the latest crop of portables offering big sounds, bold looks and all-day battery life, they're still essential even as winter takes hold, and outdoor events become less common. They're a brilliant choice for playing the festive classics at Christmas parties, or enjoying some relaxing tunes on those cosy nights in beside the fire. So which should you choose? Read on for the truth about 'tooth and pick the best box of the bunch.

1 Denon Envaya

Price £170 | $199
(www.denon.com)

The Envaya's rather basic looks and curious name may not necessarily suggest great things are afoot here, but you won't be disappointed by its performance. The 2.1 speaker array does a size-defying job, making the most of every note transferred to it via apt-X Bluetooth. Its battery life is also surprisingly impressive.

Unlike some of the speakers here, it's at home with both your sweet-vocals-and-acoustic-guitars type of music and something more full-on, thanks to a fine blend of detail and poke. It's hardly pocket-sized but you'll be more than happy to find space for it under your tree this Christmas.

★★★★★

Windows Help & Advice
BEST ON TEST AWARD
★★★★★

2 Jabra Solemate Max

Price £249 | $399
(www.jabra.co.uk)

At 3.7kg the Max is stretching the definition of the word 'portable', but despite its bulk, its audio is surprisingly lacking. With all that weight, and the combined output of two tweeters, two woofers and a bass driver, you'd expect plenty of thump, and it does deliver the goods with dance music and rock, but it's more about volume than quality, and a little underwhelming for the high price.

On the plus side, the 14-hour battery life is superb, and there's both NFC and a neatly hidden cable as additional connectivity options, but its lack of subtlety and price tag let it down.

★★★☆☆



3 Monster Superstar

Price £99 | $130
(www.monsterproducts.com)

Monster claims that its little Superstar is "The world's smallest audiophile speaker." We're not sure about that, but it does put out a very pleasing noise for its price. The bass is punchy, the mid-range is tight, and the effect is especially pleasing on vocal-heavy tracks.

You can't complain about a lack of volume either; in fact, it goes up so loud that you start to get a bit of distortion at its upper limits. Add a water-resistant, rubberised build, a battery that will last between five and ten hours, and a chassis small enough to fit in your pocket, and it's a great little soundbox.

★★★★☆

4 Ted Baker Fastnet

Price £199 | $na (www.tedbaker.com)

'Elegant' is not a word bandied about that often when talking about Bluetooth speakers, but Ted Baker's first foray into audio kit looks positively sleek compared to the rest. Looking like a cross between a retro camera and luxury luggage, the leather-clad Fastnet comes in black, brown, pink or white and feels reassuringly well built.

The audio here is also refined. More of a stiff gale than a hurricane, it's a grown-up audio balance that's highly enjoyable when gently grooving to acoustic and vocal tracks, but a bit undercooked when the time comes to get busy with beats.

★★★★☆

5 Supertooth D4

Price £50 | $60 (www.supertooth.net)

Most of the offerings here are at the premium end of the Bluetooth market, because that's what we've chosen to focus on in this test, but if all you want is a more affordable hit of volume, in a variety of colour choices, you could do a lot worse than the D4.

Boasting excellent battery life – up to 12 hours – it also performs a lot better than you might expect for the price. Will it provide soaring highs and bass you can feel in the pit of your stomach? No, but it still sounds perfectly good. And weighing in at a mere 500g, and with a handle on top to boot, it's as portable as it is unpretentious.

★★★☆☆



Acer Aspire S3

£799 | $899 www.acer.com

An Ultrabook-style laptop with dedicated gaming hardware

The Acer Aspire S3 is an Ultrabook-style laptop with a difference. It's quite light, portable and good looking, but also incorporates a dedicated graphics processor, making it one of the few laptops in its class that could be called a gaming device.

What's the price of this sort of versatility? The Acer Aspire S3 with the Nvidia GeForce 735M costs £799/$899, which is no more expensive than some Ultrabooks with effectively no gaming skills at all. You pay for it in battery life, so this isn't quite the perfect mix of all worlds, but it's not bad at all.

New look

The Acer Aspire S3 has been around in various guises for a few years now, but the 2014 edition is quite a departure from the old models. Where the original Aspire S3 was quite rightly regarded as a bit of a MacBook Air rip-off in its looks, the new version looks a lot closer to the Acer Aspire S7, an Ultrabook with a snazzy glass lid.

In order to keep costs down, the Acer Aspire S3's lid isn't made of glass, but it still looks and feels as if it is. The aluminium frame is lacquered with several layers of glossy paint, providing a look quite unlike the metal underneath.

The rest of the Acer Aspire S3 design is sound, if not quite as pristine and perfect as the very priciest, prettiest Ultrabooks. The prevalence of obvious seams and the slightly uneven distribution of the chunky screen bezel mean it's not as pretty as a MacBook Air. But then few laptops are.

In practical terms, the Acer Aspire S3 is very good. It weighs 1.55kg and is 17.8mm at its thickest point. The S3 doesn't match the thinnest or lightest of Ultrabooks, but a couple of deliberate design choices make that impossible.

First, there's the use of dedicated graphics. Almost all slim laptops use graphics processors integrated into the central processor chipset to keep size to a minimum. There's also the storage type inside. The Acer Aspire S3 uses a hybrid drive, which provides 500GB of traditional hard drive storage and 16GB of solid state memory for the super-fast startup people expect from Ultrabook. Hard drives are, generally speaking, chunkier than SSDs, but they are also far cheaper if you want plenty of storage.

Warm welcome

The Aspire S3's bodywork is decent, if not deserving of any superlatives, and it's the same story with the screen. It's a 13.3-inch 1080p IPS display offering a bright backlight, vibrant colours and the great viewing angles you normally get with IPS. The tone of the screen is quite warm, giving whites a slightly yellow tone that skews the colours in general, but it's not too serious and the look of the display is



perfectly pleasant. The display's viewing angles are good too.

The screen rotates 180 degrees. This makes it easy to share the display, although obviously it's not quite as flexible as a removable screen tablet-laptop hybrid, or one that rotates 360 degrees like the Lenovo Yoga. It's a 'normal' laptop screen in this respect.

The Acer Aspire S3's display has a standard glossy finish and doesn't have the nova-like brightness needed to make it usable outdoors on a sunny day, but that's expected.

As you'd expect of a modern Windows Ultrabook, the screen supports 10-point multitouch. There's a fair bit of bezel around the actual display, but the entire top of the screen is a single pane of glass, giving it that higher-end look.

"The Acer Aspire S3 may appeal to those looking for a work PC that can double up for some gaming fun"

The Aspire S3 has a keyboard typical of a slim and light laptop. It uses chiclet keys that poke through the single-piece aluminium keyboard surround, and their action is a little on the shallow side.

While the usual letter keys are large enough to allow for typing that doesn't feel cramped, the keys at the laptop's edges have had to be crushed together a little in order to fit everything in. [Caps Lock] is tiny, as is the left [Shift].

Tiny trackpad

Another unfortunate effect of the keyboard's layout is that the trackpad is a little on the small side. There's plenty of room along the horizontal, but a little more room on the vertical scale would have been welcome for things like three-finger gestures.

Although clearly MacBook-inspired in its execution, the trackpad isn't all that great in use either. It gives slightly under your fingertips, and a light press registers as a click, making the tactile 'click' sensation pointless. If this is deliberate, we'd much rather see Acer adopt a lighter trackpad action than have this odd two-stage approach.

The surface of the Aspire S3's trackpad feeks quite nice to use, though. It uses a similar sort of treated glass as the top Ultrabooks, offering a smooth surface that's less tacky feeling than plastic trackpads on less expensive devices.

We were also pleased by the lacks of brand tie-ins. There are no Beats by Dre speakers, sucking up even more cash as marketing spend. However, the speakers are actually fairly good. They fire from each side of the laptop, giving at least the person using the thing a good sense of stereo.

While there isn't an extra subwoofer driver to provide actual bass (or an approximation of it), the speakers go fairly loud and offer some of the mid-range bulk that's so often missing from laptop speakers. They'll more than do the trick for the odd YouTube video. It's good to see fair speaker performance in a slim laptop that doesn't boast too much about its internal speakers.

We have no such kind words for the webcam. It's a basic 720p affair and its footage is very noisy with indoor lighting, where it's most likely to be used. Stills are no better either – pictures are very noisy and low on detail.

Most of the Acer Aspire S3's specs are typical of a mid-range Ultrabook. You get an Intel Core i5 4200U, a pretty battery-conscious 1.6GHz dual-core CPU. It's no cut-price solution, though – the lower-end version of the Acer Aspire S7 uses the same chipset. What's more likely to prove a bit of a performance bottleneck for some is the 4GB of RAM.

Most Ultrabooks at this price have 4GB of RAM, but if you're going to be doing any video editing or Photoshop editing of lots of high-resolution images at once, you may be better off with an 8GB laptop. There is no 8GB version of the Aspire S3, though, as it's intended largely as an entry-level model filling space between Acer's no-frills laptops and the Aspire S7.

The Acer Aspire S3 is a mostly pleasant laptop to use, with a light focus on gaming that may appeal to those looking for a work PC that can double up for some downtime fun. There are some minor quirks to the keyboard and trackpad, but the one thing that really holds it back is battery life. It's just not remotely close to the best out there, and stamina really matters in a highly portable laptop like this. ■

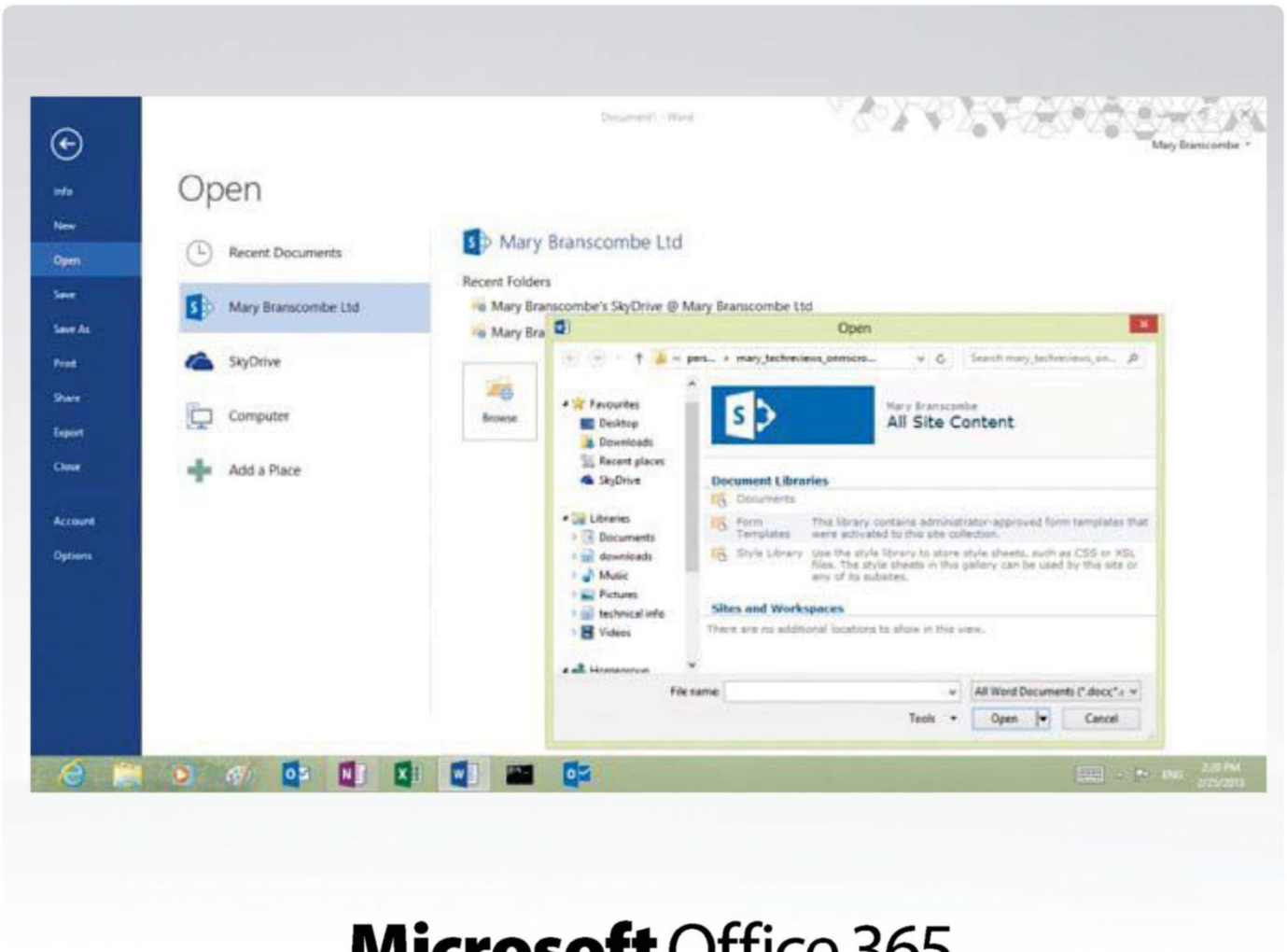
The Aspire S3 is a bit of a jack of all trades, but not every product needs to be a king to succeed.

KEY FEATURES

Acer Aspire S3

Supplier www.acer.com
Operating system Windows 8
Processor 1.6GHz Intel Core i5 4200U
Storage 500GB HDD, 16GB SSD
RAM 4GB DDR3 SDRAM
Graphics GeForce 735M 1GB
Connectivity 2 x USB 3.0, 1 x USB 2.0, HDMI-out, SD, Acer converter socket, headphone jack, 802.11b/g/n Wi-Fi, Bluetooth
Weight 1.55kg
Screen size 13.3-inch
Display resolution 1,920 x 1,080 IPS

Windows Help & Advice
Verdict



Microsoft Office 365

£80 a year | $100 a year http://office.microsoft.com

Office heads for the cloud, but does it send productivity sky-high?

Keeping in the spirit of Microsoft's recent enterprise-focused reboot, the new version of Office is more suited to business use than it used to be. It includes much more than the familiar set of software like Word and Excel, including tools for Office servers (Exchange, Lync, SharePoint and services that run on the latter like Excel Services, Project Services and the Office Web Apps). There are also hosted versions of these services provided by third parties and Microsoft itself. From March 2015 you'll also be able to buy Office 365 from Microsoft partners.

Now including hosted online services for company servers, Office 365 provides Office Web Apps and the Outlook Web app as part of this service, with subscription licenses to the actual software usable on personal desktops. Additionally, Microsoft has launched Office 365 Personal, which is intended for a single user and allows one download of Office. The consumer Office 365 'Home Premium' service costs $100 a year (£80) for Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneNote, Access and Publisher.

Family values

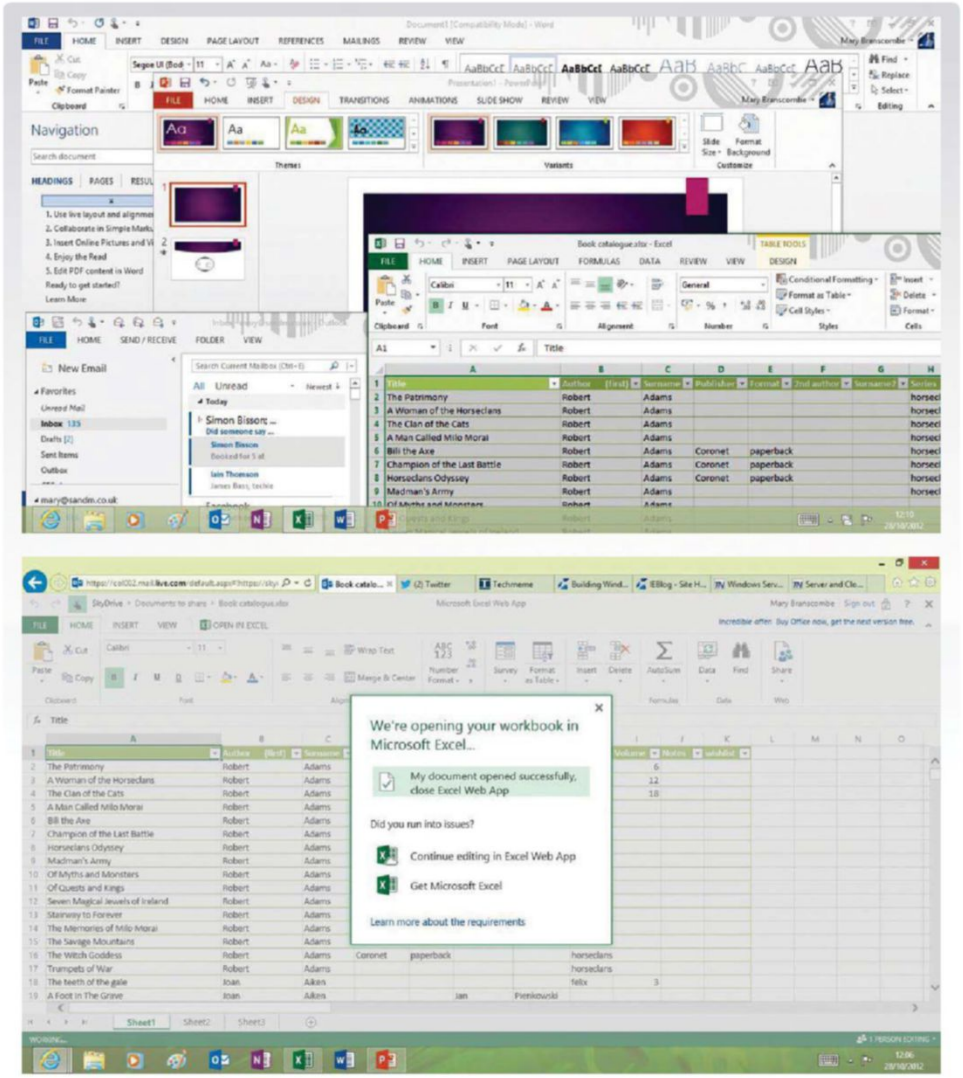
That's good value if you share it with the family; up to five people in the same household can have their own installation of Office on their PC or Mac at the same time. Apple device users get the current version of Office for Mac until a new release comes along in the future, and when the next version of Office for Windows comes out, you'll get it on the same subscription too.

All five people get an extra 20GB of space on SkyDrive to store their documents, and 60 free Skype world calling minutes a month (which can be calls to a landline or a mobile and from your PC or from a smartphone with Skype installed).

You can download the Office programs temporarily on another PC if you're away from your usual machine, even if it already has another version of Office installed. So if you have a document on a USB drive or on SkyDrive that you need to edit on another computer, and the Office Web Apps from SkyDrive lack a feature you need (like seeing revision marks in a document you're collaborating on, for example), you can use Office on Demand to get the full version of Word in just a few minutes.

You manage all this from the revamped www.office.com, and there's a link to your account in the ribbon of all the Office applications. To activate the Skype minutes you have to link your account to the Microsoft account you're using for Office 365, which can be done at www.office.com. You also get a list of your recently edited documents, which helps when using Office on Demand to give it a fresh edit.

If you're at college or university (or teach at one) it's possible to get



Office 365 University on a four-year subscription for $80 (£60), which you can use on two PCs or Macs.

Beyond business

Office 365 is great for much more than enterprise applications. Much like Apple's iCloud software, Office 365 can sync documents to a wide range of devices as well as various other services such online editing.

There are currently two tiers for Office 365: Home and Personal. The Home version costs £8 ($10) a month and enables you to install Office on up to five computers (which can be running either Windows or OS X), five tablets and unlimited smartphones. You also get 20GB of extra cloud storage for each of the five users. Personal, which costs £5.99 ($6.99) a month, is intended for a single user and provides one download of Office.

In our tests, documents created in Office synced to an iPad and various PCs, and appeared online where we could edit them to our heart's content. The seamlessness of the service is typical of Microsoft, whose business is based around offering such a smooth experience.

"The seamlessness of the service is typical of Microsoft, whose business is based around it"

Online versions of Word, PowerPoint, Excel and OneNote are all here and work quickly, although users with slower broadband speed may not see such speed. In fact, we would go so far as to say that the services available in Office 365 would be rendered useless by a slow broadband speed and users looking to purchase a subscription should check that their connection is able to support Office 365.

Still relevant

While many decry Office as being a relic of a bygone era, anyone who works in an established industry is likely to run into an Office document every now and again. There are some features of Office that cannot be found outside of the suite, especially in regards to Excel. Apple's iWork suite has come on leaps and bounds, but Numbers can't match the might of Excel for heavy number-crunching.

Cloud integration and subscription licensing made Office 2013 a landmark release for Microsoft, and this functionality has extended to Office 365, too. It's also worth noting that this is the first update that has upgraded the servers which host Office 365, making it even more stable.

The new Office 365 plans are a simple and cost-effective way to get access to new features in the desktop version of Office 2013 and new versions of Office servers, without the work of running your own servers. The new administration interface makes the service easier to work with, whatever your level of expertise, and SharePoint and Exchange Online have major new features.

Existing Office 365 users have to wait for Microsoft to schedule upgrades to their accounts (and some early migrations have caused issues with SharePoint online). Also, Microsoft still has to prove it can offer meaningful improvements on a regular basis, like taking advantage of Skype and Yammer inside Office 365.

For smaller companies that will appreciate the new, simpler interface, Office 365 is a reliable service that integrates email, document sharing and conferencing almost seamlessly with the new desktop versions of the Office software. It also has powerful options for larger businesses. The savings from putting commodity IT in the cloud and still being able to integrate with on-premise servers through Active Directory and hybrid Exchange deployments, could make the combined subscriptions for server and desktop products very attractive. ■

Office 365 is an easy and cost-effective way to get access to new features in desktop Office 2013.

Windows Help & Advice Verdict





Lenovo ThinkPad W540

£796 | $1,600 www.lenovo.com

A top-notch high-resolution workstation with a top-shelf price tag

The W540 is designed with graphical performance in mind, and is kitted out with a 15.6-inch, 2,880 x 1,620 pixel IPS display, a high-end 2.7GHz Intel Core i7-4800MQ processor and an Nvidia Quadro K2100M graphics card. It's ready to tackle anything from simple Word documents to thousand-page spreadsheets and heavy 3D modelling, but you have to ask yourself whether the power is enough to justify the price.

Design

There's nothing noteworthy about the W540's design. The chassis is a carbon copy of previous ThinkPad notebooks. It folds up into a grey rectangle devoid of flashy accents, and with only a few curved edges.

But what the W540 lacks in style, it makes up for with a carbon-fibre reinforced plastic body wrapped around a magnesium rollcage. With these rugged elements, you can expect this laptop to survive falls and other accidents that would damage other notebooks.

Despite these toughened materials though, the ThinkPad W540 still has a few soft spots. The right-hand side of the palmrest creaks under the weight of your hand, and the chassis flexes when prodded along the display hinge. These are both small imperfections that you won't notice unless you look for them, but it's still disappointing that such a toughly built laptop bends under pressure.

Another thing you won't like is the lid, which is coated with a soft-touch material that picks up dust and scratches easily. The interior is finished with a coarse, hard plastic texture. We think it would have made more sense to swap these, but the lid is made of a different glass-fibre reinforced material, which could explain why Lenovo used a soft-touch finish.

The W540 is a blocky beast that weighs in at 5.57lb and measures 14.8 x 9.8 x 1.1in, much of which is due to the optical drive. For comparison, Apple's MacBook Pro 15 with Retina Display tips the scales at only 4.46lb with 14.13 x 9.73 x 0.71in dimensions. The 14in HP ZBook is by far the smallest and lightest machine of its type though, at 13.35 x 9.33 x 0.83in and 3.57lb.

Value proposition

But size isn't everything. The HP ZBook 14 is very expensive at $3,087 (about £1,927), but despite its loftier price, it's a less capable machine. At its highest spec, it can be configured with a 1080p screen that pales in comparison to the W540's 3K resolution. The HP notebook is equipped with a slower 2.1GHz Intel Core i7-4600U processor and a less powerful AMD FirePro graphics chip. However, it does come with 16GB of RAM – twice the amount of the W540.

Apple's latest generation MacBook Pro 15 features a higher-



KEY FEATURES

ThinkPad W540

Supplier Lenovo
Operating system Windows 8
Processor 2.7GHz Intel Core i7-4800MQ (quad-core, 6MB cache, up to 3.7GHz with Turbo Boost)
Storage 256GB SSD
RAM 8GB DDR3 (2x 4GB at 1,600 MHz)
Graphics Nvidia Quadro K2100M (2GB GDDR5 VRAM), Intel HD Graphics 4600
Connectivity VGA, 2x USB 3.0, 2x USB 2.0, Express Card, 4-in-1 card reader, DC in slot, Thunderbolt, mini DisplayPort, 802.11ac Wi-Fi, Bluetooth 4.0
Weight 5.57lb
Screen size 15.6in
Display resolution 2,880 x 1,620

resolution 2,880 x 1,800 display, and is available on Amazon for $1,899. The thin machine is equipped with a 2.5GHz Intel Core i7 processor, complemented by Nvidia's GeForce 750M GPU. It's not as powerful as the W540, but you'll get a better looking and lighter machine with double the RAM, better battery life and a much more reasonable price tag.

For the best bang for your buck, it's worth considering the Dell Precision M4800. It costs $2,238 (about £1,397) for a version with almost exactly the same specs as this W540, plus a higher-resolution display. The lower price means you can consider throwing in some additional storage, RAM or other upgrades, making it an even more tempting proposition.

"The pixels on this 15.6-inch display are virtually invisible, and are tuned to produce perfect colours"

Good looking

With such impressive (and costly) parts, we weren't surprised to see the W540 perform flawlessly with any application we used. It never stuttered, regardless of whether we were browsing the web, editing images or looking at 3D printing models in AutoCAD.

The best thing about the W540 is its gorgeous 3K screen. At 2,800 x 1,620, the pixels on this 15.6-inch display are virtually invisible. What's more, they're all tuned to produce perfect and accurate colours, which can be adjusted with the optional Integrated Color Calibrator.

The high resolution makes text look crisp without turning the font into thin, unreadable scribbles, and makes just about any video look good. You can finally appreciate the quad-HD quality of the few snippets of 4K video on YouTube.

Unfortunately, the high-resolution screen also eats into battery life. During our PCMark 8 battery test the ThinkPad W540 only lasted three hours and seven minutes. With normal use you can expect to squeeze out four hours and nine minutes split between more than a dozen tabs of web browsing, some image editing in Lightroom and streaming 4K video on YouTube. Even after activating the power saver profile on the W540, we got at best five hours and 17 minutes with modest use.

Lack of apps

Despite the W540 being designed for productivity and office work, there are hardly any business applications installed. Don't expect to create spreadsheets, Word documents or images without paying for a suite or programs, or downloading a free alternative such as LibreOffice (www.libreoffice.org).

Despite this oversight, you won't be disappointed with its performance. It's a hefty and solid system that packs plenty of power to get you through all your daily tasks. Of course, with such a high price tag for this configuration, it might be too costly to justify for everyday computing. Instead, it might be a unit best reserved for professional graphic designers.

Lenovo has inherited ThinkPad's long heritage of building excellent business laptops, and the W540 is another stellar notebook. The laptop's rugged body will survive an accident better than a HP ZBook 14 or Macbook Pro 15 with Retina Display. Thanks to Lenovo's software it's a highly secure tool that won't be hacked easily. Lenovo has figured out its keyboards to a science, and the Chinese computer maker has also designed a trackpad that's twice the traditional size, making navigation even smoother and more comfortable if you're working for long periods of time.

Aside from the solid build quality and usability that we've come to expect from Lenovo, the W540 also offers a uniquely gorgeous screen. It displays text and images with great contrast, gorgeous colours and an amazing resolution, and we'd go so far as to say it's the best screen we've ever seen on a laptop. Importantly, the W540 actually has components with enough power to drive this high-resolution 3K display. If you're in the graphic design or photography world, this is one laptop definitely worth checking out. ■

The Lenovo ThinkPad W540 is a powerhouse, but too expensive for general home office use.

Windows Help & Advice Verdict



Mortimer Goth, charming as always

The Sims 4

Revisiting old haunts and geting all emotional

Price £50 | $60
Developer Maxis
Publisher EA
Multiplayer Online sharing **DRM** Origin **Web** www.thesims.com
Recommended specs Dual-core CPU, 2GB RAM, 512MB GPU

There's a blithe naivety to the way that life is presented in *The Sims* that can be either comforting or a little disturbing depending on your mood. It is set in a world where buying things is always awesome and everybody is 25 until they're 60. Regardless of aesthetic, the series has always been functionally and fundamentally Californian.

Which is fine. Ownership of a beautiful self-built home is a perfectly good fantasy to construct a game around, and given that the last two games I reviewed were about butchering goblins and disemboweling Nazis respectively, I'm not sure I'm in a position to pick too many holes in it. Nonetheless, I came to *The Sims 4* with a desire to see the experience that I've enjoyed in the past deepened by new art and smarter characters. The verdict, on that count, is a partial success. *The Sims 4* inherits an enormous number of its predecessor's ideas, goals and structures.

It's a sequel in a way that has become peculiar to this series – a fresh start that truncates or removes a huge number of elements from *The Sims 3* and its expansions in order to begin the cycle again. In doing so, developer Maxis has rebuilt the game to support a new graphical style, better animation, and an emotion system that changes its feel and flow.

After comfortably sinking 30 hours into the game I cannot imagine being without many of these new features. Multi-tasking is one. In prior Sims games, your characters performed the tasks you set for them – or those they assigned themselves, based on need – as part of a queue. Now, that queue can accommodate multiple active tasks at once as long as doing so is physically possible. Listening to music, for example, is something that a Sim can benefit from anywhere in range. A Sim who is cooking a meal can talk to their partner while they do it. They can paint and flirt, write a novel and discuss videogames, sit on the toilet and drink coffee. It feels totally natural, and Sims will, if left alone, occupy themselves with multiple tasks at once. The days of having to steer a Sim away from a rigid conversation to watch television in isolation are gone, and good riddance.

Moving experience

This newfound flexibility is matched in a movement and animation system that is – for the most part – much more forgiving than it was in previous games and far less dependent on an underlying grid to dictate movement patterns. Awkwardness is still a factor, and is sometimes exacerbated by the game's willingness to let Sims clip through each other if it resolves a pathing issue faster, but I experienced far fewer problems negotiating space in *The Sims 4* than I did in *The Sims 3*. Characters engage and disengage from conversation more fluidly than before too, and are able to do so from multiple standing and seated character arrangements.

It is not, however, without flaws. Sometimes, Sims will decide that they simply can't


There's still some awkward clipping. Note the old hand-through-the-apron trick



"That's so unfair, I hate you!"


"This is so awkward. I wish it was morning already"


Sims will take care of basic needs on their own, but need your input to thrive


Movement is now more natural – most of the time

go where you want them to go. Sometimes they'll go to the toilet in the park three blocks away because they've decided they can't get to the toilet next door. Sometimes two Sims on a date will sit and opposite ends of a bar and talk to each other across the six people in their way. Some of these oddities are new, and some of them are very, very old; I find it easier to forgive the former than the latter. Where a problem emerges from new technology, it can be filed under away under 'good intentions'. When basic pathing issues still occur after 14 years, it's harder to dismiss.

These details – both the positive and the negative – are so important because negotiating them is what you spend your time doing. As a management game, *The Sims 4* is not challenging. It's about wish fulfillment to a fairly

Plotting and planning

How the world works

1 The currently-controlled household is marked by a green plumbob. This is normally a family that you've created, and clicking on this allows you to return home.

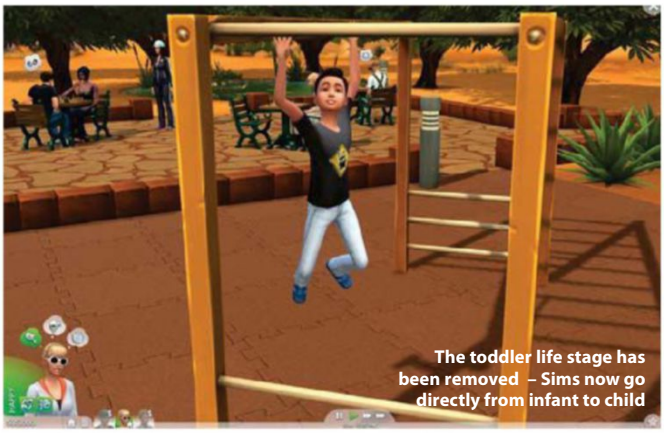
2 Homes occupied by other families are marked with a grey plumbob. Click on it and then click the 'Play' button to switch over and start controlling them instead.



3 You can build anything you want on an empty lot, but the individual or family you want to move in will need to be able to pay the total cost of the building and its contents.

4 Communal lots such as museums can't be used as homes, but you can change that by altering the lot type via a menu. Live in a library! Turn a home into a cafe!

5 These buttons in the top-left switch between worlds. Sims can move between the two at will, so you'll find Oasis Springs residents in Willow Creek's nightclub.


The toddler life stage has been removed – Sims now go directly from infant to child

substantial degree, and while you'll be asked to earn money and social standing and career success in order to achieve those wishes actually getting there is a matter of time rather than effort. Every Sim has a lifetime ambition, chosen at character creation – just like in *The Sims 3*. The criteria are more complex this time around, but it really just amounts to a longer list of things to do. Tell 20 jokes, write five books, own a voodoo doll, and so on. Finishing an ambition grants various awards and special abilities.

Careers are similar, but their promotion paths are longer. Beyond a few choose-you-own-adventure style text boxes, you have no interaction with what your Sims do during their working day. Instead, as before, you attempt to meet certain criteria in their spare time in the hopes of earning a promotion. It's pleasant and absorbing, but perhaps too straightforward.

This is in spite of the complexity promised by the new emotion system. Rather than simply be governed by their biological needs, Sims now have drives that come from their emotional state, and that, in turn, unlock new actions in the environment. It's a strong addition that adds some welcome colour to the game, but it's so easy to incur the ideal emotional state for what you want to achieve that it may as well be just another criterion to fulfill before packing your Sim off to work for the day.

What a feeling

Where emotions more clearly show their promise is in the minute day-to-day interactions between Sims, and in the opportunity they provide the game's designers to express a bit of personality. I wonder, earnestly and fondly, about the nature of the person who decided that a confident Sim should be able to 'pee like a champion', or that an enraged Sim should unlock the power to 'have an angry poop'.

The system is at its best when you're steering your Sims directly, discovering new interactions through their feelings. It's less successful as part of the game's overall simulation. Without you prompting them into work, love, creativity or crime, unattended Sims will subsist on orange juice and cereal, watching the TV and browsing the internet until the bills go unpaid, utilities are shut off one by one, and they mooch around alone and unhappy. This has always been true of the series, but *The Sims 4* does so much to deepen its characters' internal lives that it's a shame that there's no option to simply let the simulation run.

Emotions and traits can create entertaining situations. I watched a mother explain 'woohoo' to her teenage son only for him to become embarrassed and run off to hide under his duvet covers. In one instance, two Sims that had both missed their birthday parties fled to separate rooms to cry in isolation. I saw a tiny Sim version of our editor-in-chief Graham Barlow excise his anger by yelling at a child in the park. These little moments of character are great, but with prolonged exposure they become background detail rather than a lasting part of your ongoing narrative. In 30 hours I never saw a Sim that I didn't directly control make a bold decision because of their emotions, ambitions or traits. Those choices are left to the player, even when you've opted in for full automation. There's some sense to that, but I'd have loved the option to simply let my Sims out into the world and watch what they did.

A note on tone: I've heard a few longtime players express concern about the way that promotional material for The *Sims 4* focused on the wackier elements of the gameworld – woohoo in space, man-eating plants, and so on. All of that stuff is present but it's included in the game at your discretion depending on your choice of ambition, career, and interior design. The Grim Reaper still shows up when a Sim dies, and from birth to death their lives are touched by silliness, but generally speaking you're free to establish the tone you want for your particular story.

Location, location

Neighbourhoods have been restructured in a way that will be controversial with fans of *The Sims 3* and anybody who has feared that the series would suffer the same downscaling that afflicted its cousin, *SimCity*. There are two 'worlds', Willow Creek and Oasis Springs, each comprising a handful of small areas with four or five building plots. You can only load one interior at a time, and traveling between locations involves a (short) loading screen. *The Sims 3*'s cars and bikes are gone.

AI-controlled Sims populate each area in substantial numbers, and even though the abstract map screen doesn't quite have the same sense of life as *The Sims 3*'s open world, individual areas feel more active than they did before. With a bit of tinkering, it's also possible to fundamentally customise these small words to your liking by changing plots to support different types of buildings. You can build your own cafes and museums as well as homes, and that encourages the degree of obsessive personal attachment that many fans will be looking for. It also seems like it'd be easier to expand upon in future.

If there's a downside to these places it is that they

Popularity contests

Which celebrities shine in the community gallery?


Taylor Swift Popular with tweens and 20-something games journalists.

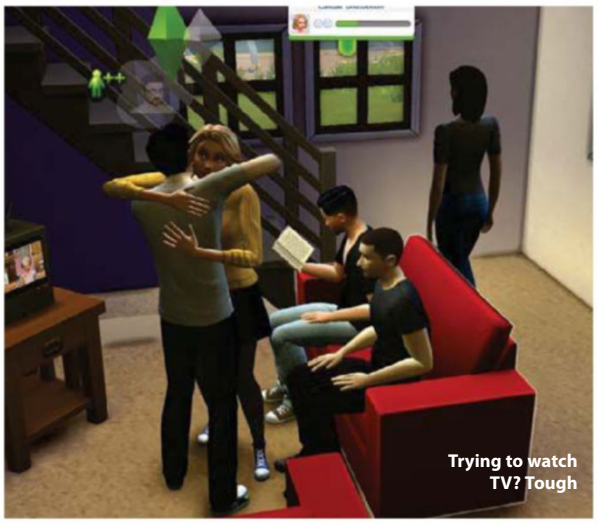

Barack Obama Some renditions are excellent. Others are less so.


Leonardo DiCaprio Sadly, there's no 'Howard Hughes' option.


Hitler In any online community, it's only a matter of time before someone is compared to the dictator.


TotalBiscuit The popular YouTuber loses out to PewDiePie.


John Riccitiello Former EA CEO. Okay, I had to make this one myself.


Trying to watch TV? Tough


If in doubt, discuss the weather


Expect expansion packs with extra furniture for your virtual dolls' house


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aren't very interesting. During the game's development, a single piece of concept art was shown off multiple times – a strip of moonlit bars and houses along a stretch of river in the bayou, Louisiana by way of Paris. It was an exciting image because it was very unlike what *The Sims* had been before; it suggested an intimacy and depth of detail that, sadly, this game doesn't quite match. That strip of buildings is actually in the final game – if you spin the camera around in a particular plot in Willow Creek you can see it, across the river. But it's just a static mesh in the distance; a hint of what might have been.

Of course, that's before players themselves make it so. *The Sims 4*'s build tools are the best in the series. Rescaling rooms is far easier than it was before, and the improvements to pathing make unorthodox arrangements more viable. I spent an hour building a modernist home based on images I'd collected from the internet and the experience was far more gratifying than in The Sims 3. I expect to be amazed by what people with actual talent can do.

Making faces

The same is true for character creation. You tweak a characters' features and body type by tugging them with your mouse, and there's a wide variety of clothing options and styles. It's possible to create simulacra of yourself, friends and celebrities to an uncanny degree of accuracy, with the main weakness being that everybody is the same height. Character creation qualifies as a game in its own right, if the number of famous faces being shared online is anything to go by.

Initially I was a little skeptical about the role of cloud sharing in *The Sims* due to cynicism about EA's 'everything belongs online' policy. In this case, it works brilliantly. The Gallery is a central repository for uploading your designs and downloading other people's. If you feel like dropping a virtual Barack Obama into your neighbourhood, simply search for his name in the Gallery. Players are already sharing imaginative homes, and I suspect that it is possible to fill every home in the game with a different player's interpretations of what Taylor Swift looks like.

Cynicism is sadly warranted by the asking price, however: the game is a staggering £50/$60 on Origin. EA knows that it doesn't need to follow the trend of PC games getting cheaper because *The Sims* will always sell, but that doesn't feel like an excuse. The absence of a microtransaction store makes the acting price feel less like a mugging, but you'll probably end up paying for expansions in the future.

After a week of play, however, I feel confident in calling this the best *Sims* base game to date. It benefits from everything that Maxis has learned since making *The Sims 3,* and it provides a firm platform on which to build a future. It's the game you know, but slightly better. No other game offers what it does. There is comfort in that familiar feeling. ■

Once more with feeling. A fine if familiar base game, with great creative tools.

Windows Help & Advice Verdict











Dead Rising 3

Enjoy comical zombie slaughter on a massive scale

Price £40 | $50
Developer Capcom Vancouver
Publisher Capcom
Multiplayer Co-op, 2 players **DRM** Steam **Web** www.capcom.com
Recommended specs 3GHz CPU, 2GB GPU, 6GB RAM

The city of Los Perdidos has a zombie problem. Everywhere you look they're there, shuffling and groaning. So it's a good thing you have over 300 objects to hit them with. *Dead Rising* has always had a vast array of very silly weapons, but the third game has taken this idea to new extremes.

You play Nick Ramos, a mechanic trapped in Los Perdidos with a group of other survivors. The government will drop a bomb on the city in five days, and you have to escape before it does. *Dead Rising*'s other 'thing' is giving you a time limit, but this is the most generous one yet – which actually works against it.

The first two games had a real sense of urgency, but now you have plenty of time to explore the city, completing side quests, rescuing survivors and hunting for weapons. This feels like any number of other open-world games, complete with uninspiring fetch quests and arbitrary collectables.

But back to hitting zombies. Every weapon feels unique, whether you're carving through the hordes with a chainsaw, lopping heads off with a broadsword or mowing them down with a minigun. The sheer number of ways to squish zombies is impressive, and it feels great thanks to the tactile, weighty combat.

A world of fun

Los Perdidos is brilliantly detailed. You can enter a huge number of buildings, and they all contain unique weapons. Realism is not in *Dead Rising*'s vocabulary, and there's a shop that inexplicably sells swords, axes, knives and scythes. My face lit up when I found that place, for obvious reasons.

To make up for the bigger world, vehicles are littered around the map, including cars, bikes, vans and even steamrollers. Nick, being a mechanic, can also combine vehicles to create new, more deadly ones, like sticking the front of a steamroller onto a motorcycle. The combo weapon system is back too, so you can take a DIY approach.

Dead Rising 3 is one of those games that just wants you to have fun. It revels in its silliness, even when it's being serious. There's a cutscene where, after killing his first zombie, Nick has a moment of reflection – rendered accidentally hilarious by the fact that I had him wearing a child's superhero costume and a big handlebar moustache.

While most of *Dead Rising*'s best bits have carried over – the persistent XP system, the combo weapons, the daft hats – some of its worst have too, namely the boss battles. They're long-winded, attritional slogs and are no fun, following easily exploitable patterns. These and the filler sidequests sour the experience.

The killing-lots-of-zombies genre is overcrowded, but *Dead Rising 3* is one of the best, with an endearing dedication to fun, and some of the most inventive, hilarious weapons on PC. Be warned, though: it's a system hog, and you'll need a substantial PC to run it on the higher settings. ■

A fun open world zombie slayer with weapons, but the boss battles are a real pain.

Windows Help & Advice Verdict



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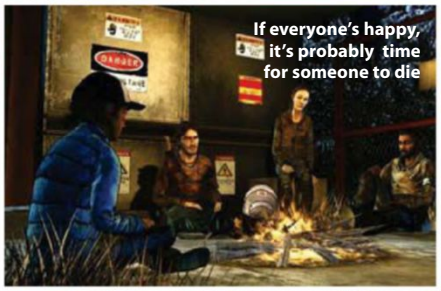
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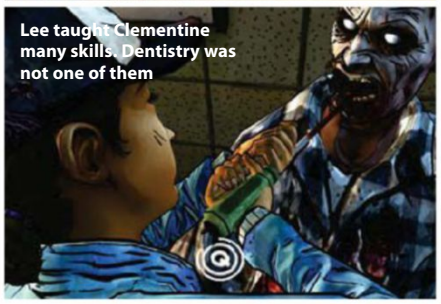

I sure hope there are no cannibals in this one


The old 'cover yourself in zombie guts' trick. Works every time


Michael Madsen is even creepier than in *Reservoir Dogs*


You really only need one hand, right?


If everyone's happy, it's probably time for someone to die


Lee taught Clementine many skills. Dentistry was not one of them

The Walking Dead Season 2

Clem is back, making friends and breaking hearts

Price £19 | $25 for five episodes
Developer Telltale Games
Publisher In-house
Multiplayer None **DRM** Steam **Web** www.telltalegames.com/walkingdead
Recommended specs 2GHz CPU, 3GB RAM, 512MB GPU

Clementine was a sweet kid, wasn't she? The breakout star of *The Walking Dead Season 1* steps into bigger purple sneakers in *Season 2*, two years older and a decade wiser.

Season 2 follows the pattern laid down by the first series. Conversations are central, offering four dialogue options to influence the story. More dramatic binary choices sometimes affect who lives and who dies, but this is still *The Walking Dead* – anyone you save will probably kick the bucket before long. There are a few quick-time events, and playing as Clementine lends them a sense of desperation they didn't have with this first season's protagonist, Lee.

This season shakes loose the last vestiges of Telltale's point-and-click adventure legacy. *Season 2* is stronger without them, but swings too far the other way, cutting out moments when you can explore and talk to characters between major story events. There's usually one point in each episode where Clem is free to chat with her fellow survivors, but no one has much to say, and within a few minutes it's time for the next conversation-driven cutscene.

I never got to know *Season 2*'s characters as well as I wanted, but Telltale's dialogue still sketches out their personalities effectively. The change makes sense in context: where Season 1 is more about how Lee relates to his group, *Season 2* focuses on shaping Clementine as a character. I played her as a savvy child, occasionally whimpering at adults for sympathy, but more often making the calculated choices of a survivor. She was good at heart though, trying to save everyone, even when it seemed hopeless.

There were other ways to play her, all presented through great dialogue, but it's soon obvious that she can't be a powerful protagonist and a believable kid. Too many life-or-death decisions fall on her shoulders. Too many other survivors are incompetent.

Episode 2 is easily my favourite of the season. Clementine has the power to make choices, but isn't treated like an adult. And for every important decision she can make, there's another situation in which she's powerless.

Episode 2 also introduces antagonist Carver, voiced by the gravel-throated Michael Madsen. Carver is a great villain. He's menacing, maybe insane, but hand-to-God believes that his decisions (which usually involve killing people) are justified.

In *Season 2*, Telltale added the option to replay episodes from checkpoints and save to a different file. It sounds like heresy (the anguish is the point!) but seeing how the moving pieces fit together made me appreciate the game even more. Telltale knew how Clementine's story would end, but you can shape the path that takes her there. ■

Not as fresh as *Season 1*, but it packs an emotional punch when it counts.

Windows Help & Advice Verdict

★★★★☆

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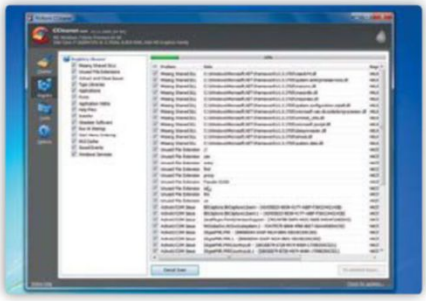


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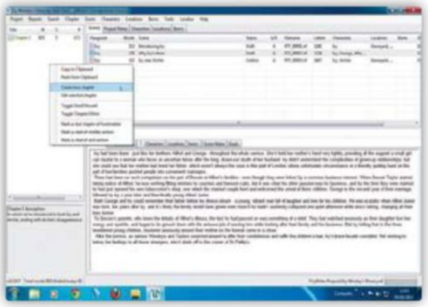
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Jeremy Ford disc editor
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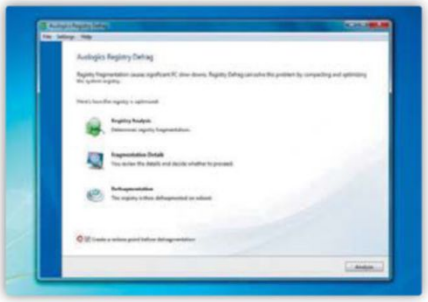
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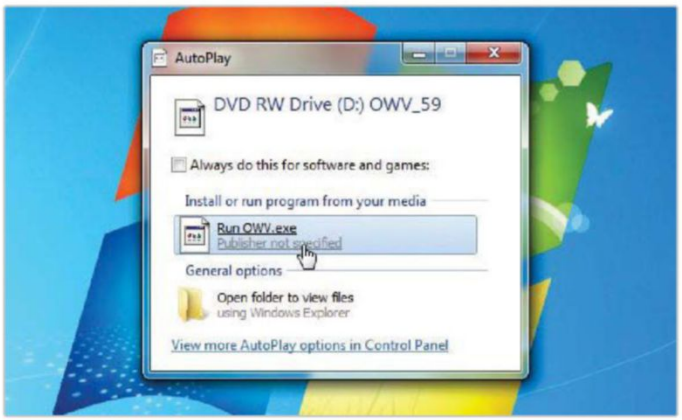


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Tel: 01225 442244 **Fax:** 01225 732275
Email: windowsmagazine@futurenet.com
Web: www.facebook.com/windowsmag

EDITORIAL
Editor-in-chief Graham Barlow
Deputy editor Nick Odantzis
Commissioning editor Dave James
New media editor Jeremy Ford

ART/PRODUCTION
Art editor Fraser McDermott
Operations editor Catherine Emma Ellis

CONTRIBUTORS
Editorial Mary Branscombe, Ian Evenden, Dan Grabham, Christian Hall, Nick Peers, Ed Ricketts
Photography Joseph Branston, Dave Caudrey, Philip Sowels, Thinkstock.com, iStockphoto.com, Gettyimages.com

ADVERTISING
For ad enquiries please contact
Richard Hemmings (richard.hemmings@futurenet.com)

MARKETING
Group marketing manager NOT YET APPOINTED
Marketing manager Richard Stephens

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION
Production controller Marie Quilter
Production manager Mark Constance
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CIRCULATION
Trade marketing manager Juliette Winyard (07551 150 984)

SUBSCRIPTIONS
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Overseas reader order line & enquiries +44 (0)1604 251045
Online enquiries www.myfavouritemagazines.co.uk
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LICENSING
International director Regina Erak
regina.erak@futurenet.com
+44 (0)1225 442244 Fax +44 (0)1225 732275

MANAGEMENT
Content & marketing director Nial Ferguson
Head of content & marketing, technology Nick Merritt
Group editor-in-chief Paul Newman
Group art director Steve Gotobed

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Chief executive Zillah Byng-Maddick
Non-executive chairman Peter Allen
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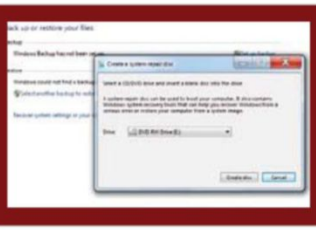
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